

**DRAGGING DOWN HEAVEN: JESUS AS MAGICIAN
AND MANIPULATOR OF SPIRITS IN THE GOSPELS**

by

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ABSTRACT

Re-reading the Gospels after familiarising oneself with the main tenets of ancient magic is an immensely enlightening experience. Not only are we more attentive to an unfamiliar belief system that underlies the formation of these texts, but we are also immediately aware that we are reading an account of the life of a magician. Drawing evidence from various literary, religious and magical sources, this thesis will demonstrate that the methods of healing and exorcism employed by Jesus in the Gospels are extensively paralleled within the ancient magical tradition and the secretive and coercive behaviour typically associated with the magicians of antiquity can be clearly discerned not only within the hostile polemical materials, but in the portrait of Jesus presented by the Gospel authors themselves. In addition, Jesus' authoritative behaviour and his competent application of common techniques of magical spirit-manipulation involving the dead, the demonic and the divine throughout the Gospels indicates that the correlation between Jesus and his spiritual power-source is far from consistent with a model of passive spirit-possession, but is comparable instead to the coercive relationship that existed between a magician and his assisting spirit in the ancient world.

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‘A sound magician is a mighty god’

~ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, Act I. Scene I. ~



ABBREVIATIONS

AJS	American Journal of Sociology
AJSL	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
BDB	Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999)
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CPh	Classical Philology
CR	Classical Review
EphTL	Ephemerides Théologiques et Lovanienses
EvT	Evangelische Theologie
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HR	History of Religions
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
JAF	Journal of American Folklore
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JPT	Journal of Pentecostal Theology
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JR	Journal of Religion
JSHJ	Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
KJV	King James Version
NIBC	<i>New International Bible Commentary</i> (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990)
NovT	Novum Testamentum
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NTS	New Testament Studies
PGM	Karl Preisendanz (ed.) <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Grieschischen Zauberpapyri</i> , 2 vols (Stuttgart: Teubner 1973)
PW	'Pauly-Wissowa', i.e. <i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
RB	Revue Biblique
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology

SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TCL	Twentieth-Century Literature
TDNT	Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–)
VC	Vigiliae Christianae
VT	Vetus Testamentum

LIST OF PAPYRI

PGM	Date (Century)
I	IV/V
II	IV
III	IV
IV	IV
V	IV
VII	III/IV
VIII	IV/V
XIa	V
XII	IV
XIII	IV
XV	III
XXXII	II
XXXVI	IV
LVII	I/II
LXI	III
LXXII	I/II
CI	V
PDM	
XIV	III

Dating of papyri taken from H. D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) pp. xxiii-xxviii. Further information, such as location and library number, is available at this reference.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTIONS, INFLUENCES AND INTENTIONS

‘The magician Merlin had a strange laugh,
and it was heard when nobody else was laughing...
He laughed because he knew what was coming next.’

~ Robertson Davies, *World of Wonders* ~

A combination of bad weather, a lacklustre congregation and the unrelenting desire of an overenthusiastic clergy to recreate the events of Holy Week in all their magnificent detail, resplendent with rusty iron nails and large wooden cross, had landed me with a speaking part in the trial narrative at St. Bartholomew’s Church on Good Friday, Holy Week, 1998. I had avoided participation in the Easter readings and drama pieces of previous years since my usual position at the organ was at a considerable distance to the main altar and the inevitable pause in the proceedings while I descended from the loft to join the cast was considered to be impracticable and time-consuming. Nevertheless, there were concerns that due to the poor turn-out for the Good Friday service that year, there could potentially be more participants in the reading of the trial narrative than seated in the congregation and so I was enlisted in the minor role of the fictional character Jolbad, a cleaner in the temple. When practicing my part before the service started, a few lines immediately leapt out of the script at me. When testifying to Jesus’ miracle-working

powers before Caiaphas, my character Jolbad says:

‘He...Jesus, that is...
He does tricks,
He does magic tricks;
He does tricks with fish and bread;
He does tricks with trees;
He threatens to move mountains and ruin out landscape.’¹

Magic. I expect that my comprehension of the word at the time was fairly typical; a composite jumble of images consisting of Mickey Mouse with a pointy wizard’s hat in Walt Disney’s *Fantasia*, a vague recollection of the witch trials from history lessons at school, late night episodes of David Blaine performing card tricks on the TV, the extensive popularity of the current Harry Potter craze and recollections of a guy in a bar in Birmingham who made my ten-pound note disappear only to recover it from inside his beer glass. So was Jolbad claiming that Jesus was like Harry Potter? Or David Blaine? Or even a witch? Such a proposal seemed ridiculous to me at the time and I subsequently assumed that Jolbad was a fairly dim-witted and foolish character.

The events of that Good Friday would remain dormant until an undergraduate lecture given by Prof. Mark Goodacre (who would later become one of my PhD thesis supervisors) during my final undergraduate years at Birmingham University in 2001. The two-year New Testament studies course consisted of a series of lectures intended to highlight the many roles applied to Jesus in Biblical Studies, each being inserted or removed like a set of optician’s slides to see whether the Gospel content became any

¹ The Iona Community, *The Iona Community Worship Book* (Glasgow: Wild Goose, 1988) p. 136.

clearer; Jesus the teacher, Jesus the prophet, Jesus the healer, Jesus the exorcist and so forth. One of these lectures introduced me to the character of 'Jesus the magician' and the work of Professor Morton Smith, who claimed that Jesus' conduct within the Gospel material constituted a 'coherent, consistent and credible picture of a magician's career.'² The theory that the Historical Jesus was actively practicing magic and that this behaviour is reflected in the Gospel materials was a very intriguing proposal and immediately stimulated a personal interest in this particular field of research.

Morton Smith and 'Jesus the Magician'

Having been born in the year of its publication, I can only imagine the impact that Morton Smith's book *Jesus the Magician* had on Historical Jesus research at the time. I expect that the book's title alone sufficed to stir a response in even the most indifferent critic. Consequently I was astounded to discover that many years after *Jesus the Magician* had been published, the book still stood more or less alone in its specific field of research, albeit accompanied by a few general studies of magic in the Gospels.³ Due to this lack of subsequent studies, I initially assumed that Smith's theories were not considered to be sufficiently innovative to warrant a wealth of ensuing studies and publications. However, I soon became aware that *Jesus the Magician* had been viewed with a certain amount of disdain in New Testament Studies for quite a while, perhaps on account of the sensitive nature of the subject matter or most likely due to a scholarly

² Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978) p. 137.

³ For example, John Hull presents a comprehensive study of magic in the Synoptic Gospels (John Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, (Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd Series 28; London: SCM, 1974).

distrust of Smith himself, who was known to be a controversial and provocative character. Furthermore, the disagreement that still rages in current New Testament academia concerning the authenticity of the 'Secret Gospel of Mark' may have irreparably tainted Smith's reputation and scholars proposing that Smith had forged this text may be particularly reluctant to accept the credibility of his other theories or view them in an equally suspicious light. As a newcomer to both the study of the Historical Jesus and ancient magic, Smith's *Jesus the Magician* was a hugely frustrating starting-point from which to embark on an exploration of magic in the New Testament. Smith often makes bold statements based upon little supporting evidence and abandons certain lines of thought abruptly and without explanation, leaving the tracks cold for successive researchers. Although this was initially a great hindrance, it also provided an exciting incentive for further study. I realised that a great deal of Smith's thinking had yet to be investigated and consequently there were many tantalisingly dark corridors in *Jesus the Magician* that needed to be fully explored.

The research proposal submitted for this study did not commit the work to a particular standpoint regarding Smith's book. Although I was fully aware of the controversies surrounding the Secret Gospel of Mark and the character of Smith himself, I was determined to isolate *Jesus the Magician* from such controversy and present a balanced evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Smith's thesis. The result of which would either be a) a rejection of the theory that Jesus appears as a magician within the Gospels and a thorough critique explaining why these allegations are unfounded, or b) a study which lends weight to Smith's book, expanding his theories and highlighting areas that

have previously been overlooked. Initially this approach was borne out of genuine naivety regarding the implications of Smith's work, however by engaging with the magical material and familiarising myself the worldview of the ancients, my familiar, ingrained 'school-R.E.-class' correlation between the figure of Jesus and his divine power was gradually eroded away, particularly by the revelation that other individuals in antiquity were performing miracles, including healings and the raising of the dead, by using magical techniques and manipulating both demonic and divine spiritual powers. In light of the widespread nature of the allegation that Jesus was a magician and the popular usage of these alternative magical power-sources in the ancient world, it became clear at an early stage in my research that the premise that Jesus was a magician should be taken very seriously.

Magic and the Historical Jesus

When applying a particular persona or set of attributes to the person of Jesus, the question of whether we intend to offer an insight into the *historical* Jesus (i.e. Jesus the figure of history) or the *literary* Jesus (i.e. Jesus the literary construct) is of central importance. When proposing that Jesus 'was a magician' we must ask whether we are claiming that the Historical Jesus used magical techniques and he should be viewed historically as a magician, or whether this wizard-like figure was carefully crafted by an author and exists only within the pages of his text, bearing little or no resemblance to the activities of a real individual.

A major difficulty that is encountered when attempting to establish a clear division between Historical Jesus material and the fictional inventions of an author is demonstrated by the frequent appearance of the figure of Jesus the magician in anti-Christian polemical writings. The connotations of deviant behaviour that magic carried in the ancient world ensured that the opponents of a movement would seek to associate its leader with the practice of magic and thereby harm the reputation of the group leader and his followers. If the depictions of Jesus as a magician found within the polemical texts are borne out of hostility and malice that was directed towards the early Christians, then it is highly likely that the figure of 'Jesus the magician' is a literary creation and consequently evidence drawn from these sources cannot be considered to represent a historically accurate picture of the life of Jesus. However, there is also a strong possibility that these texts represent an alternative perspective on Jesus' activities that was suppressed by early Christianity and therefore it is equally credible that these accounts preserve details of the Historical Jesus' activities that were rejected by the early Christians.

Since materials within this thesis will be drawn from non-Christian sources (such as Josephus and Celsus), canonical sources (such as the Synoptic Gospels) and non-canonical sources (such as the Gospel of Peter and Secret Mark), we cannot assume, therefore, that the Historical Jesus can only be discerned in favourable material (i.e. writings which portray Jesus in a positive light) while the figure of Jesus which appears in negative, polemical texts must be a literary creation of its embittered author and bear no resemblance to the Historical Jesus. Equally, we must be aware that the Gospel

authors may be inclined to insert apologetic material and embellish their material favourably in order to endorse the figure of Jesus to the reader, thereby similarly distorting our perception of Jesus and creating a literary figure that bears no resemblance to the Historical Jesus. Nevertheless, since some readers might reject the possibility that the Historical Jesus engaged in magical behaviour on the basis that the figure of Jesus the Magician features prominently in anti-Christian polemic, in order for a charge of magic to be both convincing and historically plausible it is clear that evidence must not only be gathered from polemical or apocryphal sources, but primarily from the Gospels themselves.

The possibility that a historically reliable portrait of the Historical Jesus' life and teachings can be reconstructed from material found within the Gospels has proven to be a methodological minefield within New Testament academia. Although various attempts to establish a stratum of earliest Synoptic material in order to authenticate the historicity of certain details concerning the Historical Jesus have produced a series of differing opinions regarding the literary relationships between the Synoptic Gospels, many New Testament scholars agree that the Gospel of Mark was used as a foundation by the authors of Matthew and Luke and both expanded Mark's Gospel using a common source, known as Q, and material particular to each evangelist. Consequently, the Gospel of Mark is considered by many scholars to be the earliest Synoptic account of Jesus' ministry and the most valuable Synoptic source of historical information on the person of

Jesus. Since the theory of Markan Priority remains the dominant approach for studying Synoptic interrelationships, this majority position will be assumed throughout this thesis (I will not, however, be assuming the existence of Q, which I regard as problematic⁴).

Upon turning to the Gospel of Mark, we are immediately confronted with the figure of Jesus the Magician as certain reports of Jesus' healings and exorcisms within Mark's Gospel contain magical behaviours and techniques that were extensively employed by magical practitioners in the ancient world. A reader of the Matthean and Lukan Gospel narratives who has an awareness of the negative implications of this type of behaviour will quickly observe that the Markan material appears to have passed through a kind of 'evangelist filter' and a great deal of the magical techniques present within Mark's Gospel have been omitted. We could assume that this material was omitted on the grounds that it was considered to be uninteresting to the reader or irrelevant to the narrative. However, due to the consistency with which the redactors remove these suspicious techniques from their received traditions, I would suggest that the underlying motives behind the composition of the Gospels and a sensitivity towards implications of magic may have significantly influenced the omission of this magical material in both Matthew and Luke.

⁴ For a defence of the theory of Markan Priority without Q, see Mark Goodacre, *The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002). For more on the Farrer Hypothesis (Markan Priority without the existence of Q), see A. M. Farrer, 'On Dispensing with Q' in D. E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), pp. 55-88; Michael Goulder, 'On Putting Q to the Test', *NTS* 24 (1978), pp. 218-24; Edward C. Hobbs, 'A Quarter-Century Without "Q"', *Perkins School of Theology Journal* 33/4 (1980), pp. 10-19.

As the Gospels were largely composed for evangelistic purposes, the Gospel writers carefully assessed their received traditions and used what was deemed suitable in order to place emphasis upon particular aspects of Jesus' ministry. Therefore, although the evangelists are keen to promote Jesus engaging in activities that strengthen the faith of the reader, such as teaching, healing or prophesying, they are understandably reluctant to include evidence of practices that could be construed as having magical connotations, particularly since the allegation that Jesus was a magician featured heavily in the accusations made by his opponents. As a result, the authors of Matthew and Luke are noticeably hostile to magical behaviour and deliberately edit their received accounts accordingly whenever they feel that magical techniques are being implied. In addition to the omission of dubious material, there is also a stratum of apologetic material that appears to have been overlaid onto the narratives by the redactors in order to explain, justify or refute rumours of magical practice in Jesus' ministry. That the Gospel writers actively sought to include material that deliberately threw the reader off the scent of magical behaviour suggests that they were aware that allegations of magical practice were being made against Jesus. It is therefore difficult to determine whether the Historical Jesus actively engaged in anti-magical activities or whether this is a literary device used by the Gospel writers to distance their hero from a charge of magic.⁵

In order to distinguish between the indications of magical practices that are valuable to the Historical Jesus scholar and the anti-magical, apologetic character of Jesus that has been created by the Gospel authors, the following study will attempt to separate the wheat

⁵ For more on anti-magical apologetic material in the Gospels, see Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978) pp. 105, 140-141.

of authentic magical behaviours that could trace their sources back to the Historical Jesus from the chaff of apologetic or polemic material that has been invented by the Gospel evangelist or the early opponent of Christianity. We must therefore keep a keen eye on the Synoptic interrelations at work within passages that contain magical techniques or behaviours and consider the underlying intentions and biases of each Gospel evangelist. If it is clear that an author's evangelical objectives have influenced the behaviour or speech of Jesus within a particular passage and it is doubtful that the passage holds any significant value for Historical Jesus research, attention will be given to the author of the Gospel under discussion and we will speak of the Markan/Matthean/Lukan Jesus (i.e. Jesus the Markan/Matthean/Lukan construct). However, this must not be confused with a similar distinction between Synoptic authors that is made when considering a portrait of Jesus that is restricted to, or prominent within, a particular Gospel. Since certain characteristics are exhibited by Jesus exclusively, or primarily, within a specific Gospel (such as the secrecy theme in Mark's Gospel), it is often necessary to refer to the Markan/Matthean/Lukan Jesus, i.e. a portrait of Jesus that is unique to a particular Gospel narrative. In this case, it is perfectly credible that these behaviours may be traced back to the Historical Jesus and by distinguishing between Synoptic authors we do not immediately imply that Jesus' words and actions are an invention of the Gospel author.

Although the insertion of apologetic material and the anti-magical editorial process threatens to frustrate an investigation of magic in the Gospels, I would suggest that the sensitive treatment of this material by the Synoptic authors provides a valuable insight for Historical Jesus research. First, there are certain passages, which we will examine later in

this thesis, in which Matthew and Luke appear to have taken great care to remove evidence of suspicious practices and insert anti-magical apologetic whenever necessary. This suggests a considerable degree of embarrassment concerning the implications of magic present in the omitted material and this is understandable since magic carried severely negative connotations in the ancient world and it featured heavily in anti-Christian polemic. Although certain passages have been edited to remove implications of magic, elements of magical techniques still remain elsewhere in both Matthew and Luke. By reading against the grain of the Gospel narratives and appealing to John Meier's criterion of embarrassment⁶, I would suggest that it is unlikely that the Gospel writers would deliberately retain these details as they are damaging to the person of Jesus and therefore these surviving fragments of magical techniques must have been an unavoidable inclusion. Perhaps the Historical Jesus' use of a particular technique was common knowledge amongst the populace at the time of the composition of the Gospels and therefore such methods could not be ignored by the Gospel authors? If this is correct, then it is highly likely that these techniques and behaviours have their origin in the activities of the Historical Jesus.

Second, although the authors of Matthew and Luke attempt to soften connotations of magical behaviour in their Gospels, the author of Mark's readiness to mention magical techniques in his Gospel raises many important questions. Did the author of Mark fail to realise that certain techniques used by Jesus within his Gospel are similar to those

⁶ 'The point of the criterion is that the early Church would hardly have gone out of its way to create material that only embarrassed its creator or weakened its position in arguments with opponents.' (J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Vol. I*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1991) p. 168).

employed by the magicians of antiquity? Or did Mark deliberately set out to portray Jesus as a magician? The magical techniques present in Mark's Gospel are often extensively paralleled within the ancient magical tradition, therefore it is unlikely that a writer of this time would overlook connotations of magic in his Gospel or equally seek to portray his hero in such a negative light. Once again, in light of the negative stigma associated with magic in the ancient world and by reading against the grain of the evangelist's basic concerns, it is entirely possible that the Historical Jesus' use of magical technique was well-known at the time of the composition of Mark's Gospel and therefore these events constituted an unavoidable inclusion. In which case, these passages in Mark's Gospel may provide us with historically reliable accounts of the Historical Jesus employing magical techniques.

Third, the allegation that Jesus engaged in magical activities is a viewpoint that is common to friend and foe, i.e. it appears in both sources favourable to Jesus (e.g. the healing and exorcism accounts of the Gospels) and sources hostile to Jesus (e.g. the anti-Christian polemical materials and the hostile opponents of Jesus within the Gospels). This type of consensus is cited by some scholars as a reliable criterion upon which to establish Historical Jesus material.⁷ Consequently, in accordance with this criterion and on the strength of the agreement between hostile and sympathetic sources concerning the role of magic in Jesus' ministry, it is probable that the Historical Jesus exhibited behaviours that were characteristically associated with magical activity in the ancient world.

⁷ 'Once we can discern both favourable and unfavourable portraits of Jesus, we can ask what is common to both portraits and we may have considerable confidence that what is common is historically sound.' (E. P. Sanders and M. Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1996) p. 302).

Limitations of the thesis

As the figure of Jesus the Magician is not confined to a specific area of the Gospels but impacts broadly across most of the Gospel material, to exhaustively consider the general value of each of the passages discussed below for Historical Jesus research would involve a second volume to this study and almost certainly detract our attention from the study of magic in the Gospels. Therefore, issues concerning authenticity and textual variation, for example, will be included when immediately relevant, but due to the extensive nature of the subject area, each piece of evidence cannot be hounded until it has been thoroughly explored in all aspects of New Testament academia.

Since we are restricting our attention to discerning Historical Jesus material within the Synoptics, evidence from elsewhere within the New Testament will only be introduced in a supplementary manner where relevant. Material from the book of Acts, for example, will be discussed only where such evidence is deemed to directly inform the discussion. Hence, accordingly, attention will be given to the character of Simon Magus (Chapter II), the possible mistranslation of Peter's 'Tabitha' in Acts 9: 36-41 (Chapter IV), Luke's use of 'hand of the Lord' as a replacement for 'Spirit' throughout Acts (Chapter VIII), the Jewish exorcists in Acts 19:11-20 (Chapter IX), Paul's exorcistic use of the name of Jesus in Acts 16:18 and Peter's use of the name of Jesus when healing in Acts 3:6 (Chapter IX). The reader who is interested to learn more about the magical themes within Acts is directed to Hans-Josef Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) and Daniel Marguerat, 'Magic

and Miracle in the Acts of the Apostles' in Todd Klutz (ed.), *Magic in the Biblical world: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, JSNTsupp 245 (2003) pp. 100-124.

The reader must also be forewarned that the resurrection will not be addressed in any depth within this thesis and our study of the Gospels will terminate at Gethsemane. There are a number of reasons for this decision. First, three major indicators of magical practice in antiquity will be outlined in Chapter II and each of these points will be dealt with in turn throughout the thesis. Since evidence of the third and most prominent indicator of magical practice in antiquity is largely found in the Gethsemane and final crucifixion scenes, we will devote a great deal of attention to a thorough examination of these Gospel passages in Chapter VIII. Although an investigation into the resurrection narratives may seem to be a natural progression from this point in compliance with the sequence of the Gospel narratives, this would inevitably have a postscript feel to it and disrupt the order of points set out in Chapter II. Second, to exhaustively investigate the resurrection accounts for evidence of magical practice would require a thorough examination of both Christian deification rites and deification techniques found within the ancient magical tradition, particularly ascension rituals such as the Mithras liturgy. Although deification techniques feature within this thesis (Chapter VIII in particular), this is an enormous area of study and to comprehensively consider the resurrection in terms of magical deification would certainly require an additional chapter to this thesis.⁸ Finally, although the

⁸ For a broad survey of deification techniques in ancient magic, see Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001), chapter 5 (pp. 70-85). Readers who are interested in the early Christian doctrine of deification are directed to Mark D. Nispel, 'Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia', *VC* 53. 3 (1999) pp. 289-304.

possibility that the resurrection stories may carry magical implications poses an interesting area of enquiry (and one which I fully intend to pursue in future research), I suspect that the process of reviewing the background of scholarly critique in this area will inevitably reiterate a great deal of material that is familiar to the New Testament scholar. In contrast, I was concerned that the magical use of Jesus' name and spirit following his death had not been adequately addressed in any study I had encountered during my research and therefore in the final chapter, by way of conclusion, the natural progression into a discussion of the resurrection will be rejected in favour of a consideration of the contribution that can be made by this vastly overlooked area of New Testament research.

In addition, since the use of the Gospel of John as a source of information on the Historical Jesus is often disputed, the presence of Johannine material within this thesis necessitates justification. Significant dissimilarities from the Synoptics in both discourse and the overall time-span of Jesus' career have led many scholars to question the historical reliability of the Gospel of John. For example, the Jesus Seminar claimed that no saying within John's Gospel could be traced with certainty back to the Historical Jesus and Robert Funk, the founder of the Jesus Seminar, concluded 'scholars regard the Fourth Gospel as alien to the real Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth.'⁹ Questions regarding the influential role of the Christian faith upon the historical reliability of John's Gospel were raised by D. F. Strauss in his seminal work *Leben Jesu* (published in two volumes in 1835-36). Strauss essentially set out to highlight the distinction between the Jesus of

⁹ Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar (eds), *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: A New Translation and Commentary* (Calif: Macmillan, 1993) p. 33.

history and the Jesus of faith in the Gospels and he concluded that Christian faith had influenced the portrait of Jesus in John's Gospel.¹⁰ In more recent times, however, New Testament criticism has become increasingly receptive to the historicity of Johannine material. Craig L. Blomberg, for example, argues in favour of the historicity of the Gospel of John and many contemporary New Testament scholars defend the use of Johannine material in their studies.¹¹ In view of this development, evidence from the Fourth Gospel will certainly be included within this thesis where deemed relevant.

A note on the Greek Magical Papyri

Magic, like music, was recorded in the form of manuscripts and through study of its notation we can build up a picture of its performers, instruments and audiences. Throughout this thesis we will appeal to a collection of magical manuscripts that are frequently cited in the academic study of magic in the ancient world; the *Greek Magical Papyri*, or *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM).¹² These texts have their origin in Greco-

¹⁰ David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*. Translated by George Eliot (London: Chapman, 1846 (German original, 1835-1836)). Recently reissued, London and New York: Continuum, 2006.

¹¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2001) pp. 164-72. In addition to Blomberg, scholars who support the historicity of Johannine material include J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Vol. II*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1991) pp. 798-832 and Graham Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999) pp. 308-10.

¹² References to the Greek magical papyri will be made under the abbreviation 'PGM'. English translations will be taken from Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and the Greek texts will be taken from Karl Preisendanz (ed.), *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973).

Roman Egypt and date from the second-century BC to the fifth-century CE. Although the majority of these texts are later than the New Testament period (as demonstrated by the occasional inclusion of biblical names) they are considered valuable to the study of ancient magic as it is highly likely that they include material from earlier sources, perhaps dating from before the first century. For example, Peter Bolt argues:

‘although the magical papyri are mostly later than the NT period, they are nevertheless useful for comparative purposes, since it is highly probable that they represent collections of earlier material.’¹³

In support of an earlier dating for the material in the magical papyri, Peter Bolt argues that spelling mistakes within certain texts indicate that the received texts were not correctly understood by the magical practitioners. Furthermore, many of the spells are professionally produced and act as ‘exemplars into which the magician would insert the client’s name.’¹⁴ Accordingly, John Hull proposes:

‘there is no doubt at all that the existing magical papyri are not original compositions. They contain records of traditional forms of actions and words which to a large extent are copied from earlier manuscripts.’¹⁵

Hull draws support for this statement from PGM V. 1-53, a divinatory text entitled ‘Oracle of Sarapis’. He notes that Karl Preisendanz has recorded a number of interlinear variants within this text; for example, line 7 has the variant ἦ βαίβεβοθ written above

¹³ P. G. Bolt, ‘Jesus, the Daimons and the Dead’ in Anthony N. S. Lane (ed.) *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm* (Paternoster: 1996) p. 87.

¹⁴ P. G. Bolt, ‘Jesus, the Daimons and the Dead’, p. 87.

¹⁵ John Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p. 20.

(‘übergeschrieben’) the word βαμβειζεθ, in line 13 Preisendanz reads αλλ/αν as ἄλλως ἄνω¹⁶ and after the magical word μεθομηνως in line 15 there is a small ‘s’ sign which Preisendanz believes indicates a variant reading.¹⁷ Hull concludes that these variants within the text are ‘not...a correction or later addition but a variant reading. Our scribe has before him at least two copies of the document he is transcribing.’¹⁸

Although there is a strong possibility that the PGM texts record magical traditions that pre-date the composition of the manuscripts, supplementary evidence will be provided from earlier magical traditions and/or texts that can be reliably dated wherever possible in order to avoid the dating difficulties that are raised by the PGM texts.

The word ‘magic’

During the preliminary stages of this study it was necessary to depart from New Testament and Historical Jesus research in order to engage with other subject areas that have a direct impact upon our line of enquiry; namely psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, classics and Christian art. A considerable period of time was spent familiarising myself with the main theories of ancient magic, which is in itself a huge field of research. Following a great deal of careful consideration, I found it necessary to

¹⁶ Karl Preisendanz (ed.), *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, Vol. I (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973) p. 181.

¹⁷ Preisendanz comments on this unfamiliar sign: ‘Das Zeichen nach ηω unverständlich; betrifft vielleicht die Varianten?’ (*Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. I, p. 181).

¹⁸ John Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p. 23

use the incendiary terms ‘magic’ and ‘magician’ although I was aware that I was opening an anthropological and theological ‘can of worms’ which had the potential to tie all subsequent lines of enquiry into etymological knots. The task of defining ‘art’, for example, is made mildly easier for the historian or philosopher since most art works have survived to the current day in their original form, either in printed book, manuscript notation, or oil painting. Furthermore, these art works are made easily accessible to the general public, through bookshops, the internet or various reproductions of ‘authentic’ performances on CD. The modern reader, observer, listener or performer is able, in most cases, to engage with a piece of art in its original or ‘authentically reproduced’ form and therefore he or she can develop an awareness of the many expressions of ‘art’ that have existed throughout history and from a variety of diverse continents. Even though our modern playwrights produce theatre that differs from that found on the Shakespearian stage, we have usually encountered an adequate amount of Shakespeare in English literature classes at school to familiarise ourselves with the differences in the use of the English language and stage direction. Similarly, if our taste in music does not extend beyond modern rock or R ‘n’ B, the excerpts of Mozart that we hear in television adverts expose us to the varieties of musical genre and we can appreciate the historical development of sound, from acoustic to electric and natural to synthesized. By engaging with these various expressions of ‘art’, both the expert and amateur alike can immerse him or herself in a specific historical setting and observe parallels or dissimilarities by comparing the historical art form against its modern equivalent. This ease of comparison is not possible with magic and herein lies the problem.

When taking the initial exploratory steps into the academic study of magic in antiquity it became immediately apparent to me that our popular, contemporary understanding of magic is considerably dissimilar to the use of the term in the ancient world. The word 'magic' has suffered significant distortions in meaning throughout its evolution from ancient to modern usage and this is largely due to our modern-day unfamiliarity with the belief systems of the ancient world-view. It was clear that in order to recognise the full significance that the word 'magic' would have carried in antiquity, particularly at the time of Jesus, the modern reader must disregard his or her own general conception of magical behaviour and adopt, or at least attempt to appreciate, the perspective of a first-century audience. It is therefore entirely appropriate to begin with a justification of the use of the word 'magic' in this study, clarifying how it is to be understood and detailing how the archaic use of the term differs from its modern incarnations. We will then attempt to construct a 'working model' of a magician in the ancient world from the various religious, magical and literary sources which provide evidence of the characteristics that were typically associated with magicians operating within antiquity. These unmistakably magical traits will fall broadly into three main categories; the social behaviour of the magician, the physical methods and rituals employed by the magician and the relationship between the magician and his gods. The archetypal figure that emerges from this investigation will inform our general understanding of the term 'magician' for the remainder of this study and establish the criterion against which we will examine the Gospel materials to determine whether they present Jesus as engaging in magical activity.

CHAPTER II

‘QUID SIT MAGUS’: REDISCOVERING MAGIC AND IDENTIFYING THE MAGICIAN

‘Elijah and Elisha, Honi and Hanina, were magicians, and also was Jesus of Nazareth. It is endlessly fascinating to watch Christian theologians describe Jesus as miracle worker rather than magician and then attempt to define the substantive difference between those two. There is, it would seem from the tendentiousness of such arguments, an ideological need to protect religion and its miracles from magic and its effects.’

~ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (p. 305) ~

The presence of the word ‘magician’ in the subtitle of this study and the hereafter application of the word ‘magic’ throughout demand that the criteria by which we are labelling an act as ‘magic’ and its practitioner as a ‘magician’ is established at the outset. Recent studies in cultural anthropology have concluded that there is no definitive model of ‘magic’ that can be applied, without exception, cross-culturally and throughout history since an all-inclusive and comprehensive title cannot be assigned to phenomena that covers such a vast historical and geographical scale and appears on the surface to vary considerably in observable behaviour and verbal discourse.¹ The difficulty is similar to that experienced by the art historian who attempts to define ‘art’ when presented with an extensive diversity of ‘art forms’ such as books, poetry, music, theatre, dance, film and

¹ On the difficulty of establishing a definition of magic, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. II. The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1991) p. 540.

painting, all of which are generally classified as ‘art’ but differ significantly in their medium and form of expression.

The futility of various attempts to reach an authoritative definition of ‘magic’ has led some scholars to suggest that we should abandon the term altogether.² However, when the determined social anthropologist or theologian believes that a definition can be attempted, there is a tendency to either classify all cultic activity with dubious elements of magical behaviour under the evasive term ‘magico-religious’ or spend such great time and effort establishing the etymology of the word ‘magic’ that there is little room in the rest of the study for its subsequent application to a particular theory. Fortunately, to the relief of the sanity of both myself and the reader, it is not within the scope of this study to establish a ‘catch-all’ term that will encompass all forms of magical practice. Although initial preparation for this study has involved a thorough investigation into the various cultural definitions of magic that have emerged throughout history, it is not my intention to attempt to unite the strands of magical behaviour observed within the rituals of modern pagan groups with Evans-Pritchard’s study of the Azande tribe or I. M. Lewis’ definition of magic in an Asian or South American context. Consideration of the word ‘magic’ within this study will be restricted to popular definitions of magic in circulation within the first-century Mediterranean world, extending to those cultures and traditions that may have informed and influenced the development of these classifications. More specifically,

² In his foreword to Marcel Mauss’ *A General Theory of Magic*, David Pocock states: ‘if categorical distinctions of the Western mind are found upon examination to impose distinctions upon (and so falsify) the intellectual universes of other cultures then they must be discarded or, as I have put it, dissolved. I believe ‘magic’ to be one such theory’ (D. F. Pocock’s foreword to Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* trans. R. Brain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) p. 2).

my concern within the initial stages of this study is to establish a coherent set of characteristics that were typically associated with magical practice within the environment in which the early Christian evangelists situate the ministry of the Jesus of the Gospels. By undertaking a preliminary investigation into the central defining aspects of magic in the ancient world and drawing upon evidence of the typical behaviours associated with magicians operating within a first century environment, the emergent figure of a magician and his activities will identify a set of features that can be correctly associated with magical practices within the particular era under discussion and thereby constitute a working definition of 'magic' for the remainder of this study.

Ancient vs. Modern: re-orientating our world view

If the term 'magic' had remained a concept that was disassociated from our current society and one which could be studied within the particular context of a historical period or civilization with which it had remained closely associated, then establishing a definition would be a much simpler business. Modern developments in scientific theory and the rise of religious scepticism have led many individuals to abandon the belief systems in which 'magic' flourished. However, the word itself has withstood the passing of time and remnants have found their way into current twenty-first century popular culture. Magic currently bears little resemblance to its original historical designation since it has been largely distorted by our modern reinterpretations and now appears in its contemporary incarnation as a harmless and often comical notion, often restricted to forms of family entertainment such as the circus, children's parties or as exemplified in

the flurry of interest surrounding the recent *Harry Potter* phenomenon. Due to its lingering presence in our contemporary culture and our everyday preconceptions of the term, Matthew Dickie warns in his study of magic in the Greco-Roman world that the present-day student of magic should be:

‘sensitive to the differences that exist between what the ancients saw as magic and what he himself might be inclined to call magic. If he does not make that effort, he will fall into the trap of labelling as magic what in the eyes of those using them were perfectly legitimate and unobjectionable procedures.’³

If we are to avoid Dickie’s scholarly trap then it is essential that both the modern writer and reader abandon their modern-day preconceptions of ‘magic’ and adopt the *Weltanschauung* (‘world-view’), to use Bultmann’s terminology, of the original audience which may differ considerably from the belief-systems to which they are accustomed.⁴ Howard Clark Kee, for example, understands the significance of this shift of perspective and urges that the categories of miracle and magic ‘must be analysed in terms of the life-world of the reporter and of the community which is being addressed.’⁵ An appreciation of the ‘life-world’ of the ancients is hugely significant when addressing the concepts of ‘magic’ and ‘miracle’ since the value and importance placed upon the interaction between humanity and the spiritual realm in particular has a direct impact upon how we are to understand the function of these terms in antiquity. Although both the ancient and modern world-views recognise a hierarchical structure which locates humanity on the

³ Matthew Dickie, *Magic & Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 20.

⁴ Bultmann contrasts the modern *Weltanschauung* with the ancient *Weltanschauung* and considers them to be ‘two ways of thinking’ (Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM, 1960) p. 38).

⁵ Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (SNTSMS 55; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 101.

earth and a supreme being in heaven, the ancient world-view differs from our own in that it places a greater emphasis on the existence of intermediary spirits which inhabit the middle region between the divine and man. These intermediary spirits were an important everyday encounter in the early centuries and a pervasive awareness of their existence is illustrated by the emergence of religious texts in the first century which detail the activities of these spirits and ultimately gave rise to an established structure of angelology and demonology.⁶ Furthermore, the reality of evil spirits was demonstrated in the common practice of exorcism, a procedure that was even accredited to Jesus himself by the Gospel authors, and both benevolent and malevolent spirits were commonly considered to be responsible for a variety of activities, as Naomi Janowitz observes:

‘There were few instances in which angelic or demonic influence were not held responsible. Sudden illness, loss of an item, or trouble in love were attributed to demons; all types of blessings were attributed to angels.’⁷

Whenever a staunch belief in these angelic and demonic beings was asserted, it was often accompanied by the magical world-view which declared that the magician could harness the power of these spirits and exploit them for personal gain.⁸ Consequently, as we shall discover in later chapters, spirit manipulation came to be a major indicator of magical practice throughout antiquity.

⁶ For more on the rise of angelology and daimonology in the first few centuries, see Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001) pp. 28ff, also John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, SBT 2nd Series 28 (London: SCM, 1974) pp. 38-40.

⁷ Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, p. 27. John Hull notes that angels were considered in Jewish thought to influence the weather and bring about changes in the lives of both humans and animals (Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p. 38).

⁸ Kee states that the magical view ‘regards the gods and all the other powers as fair game for exploitation and manipulation.’ (Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, pp. 114-5).

This spiritual aspect of the ancient world-view has enjoyed a revival in our present age due to a resurgence of interest in new age religions which emphasise the role of angels and other spiritual beings in our daily life. Although I am confident that many individuals would subscribe to the preservation of these attitudes to a certain extent within the modern world-view, particularly since a firm belief in the existence of demons and angels is upheld by the contemporary Christian religion⁹, I would suggest that the genuine existence of angels, demons and other spiritual beings is largely rejected by the mainstream and when such creatures resurface in our present-day culture they are generally treated with a heavy dose of post-enlightenment scepticism and often come to form cultural clichés.¹⁰ A collective abandonment of the existence of these intermediary spirits situated between the divine and man in our present culture has resulted in what Paul Hiebert describes as ‘the excluded middle’¹¹ and it appears that the exclusion of these spiritual intermediaries has contributed towards the gradual degradation of our belief in the validity of the magical practices in which these spirits were an active and fundamental feature.¹² This estrangement from the authenticity of magic was encouraged in the early twentieth-century by a series of socio-anthropological studies, particularly those conducted by Frazer and his students, which played a large role in demystifying

⁹ See Thomas A. Noble, ‘The Spirit World: A Theological Approach’ in Anthony N. S. Lane (ed.), *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm* (Paternoster: 1996) pp. 185 – 223.

¹⁰ Rodney Henry comments: ‘westerners feel that [angels and demons] have little or nothing to do with the affairs of the Christian. So the existence of angels and demons is not denied, rather, it is ignored....Today, western Christianity largely ignores the existence of a spirit-world which is *other worldly*’ (Rodney L. Henry, *Filipino Spirit World – A Challenge to the Church* (Manila: OMF, 1986) pp. 17-18).

¹¹ P. Hiebert, ‘The Flaw of the Excluded Middle’, *Missiology* 10 (1982) pp. 35-47.

¹² As a result, Luhrmann notes that both magic and theology are ‘defending a hard-to-defend belief in a sceptical society’ (T. M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (London: Picador, 1994) p. 323).

magic for the modern audience. These studies scorned magic as a form of 'bad science', a misinterpretation of events that occurred by coincidence or the result of a misguided emotional reaction to situations beyond early man's control.¹³ Consequently, magic is no longer the dangerous threat that it would have been to the ancients to whom magic was very real and something to be greatly feared.¹⁴

The New Testament scholar who has entered into the world-view of the Gospels in an attempt to give an authentic historical analysis of a text will most probably find that he or she has, at some point, inadvertently stumbled across the magical world-view. However, since the ancient and modern attitudes to spiritual intermediaries and the reality of 'magic' appear to differ so considerably, the modern reader of the Gospels who is unfamiliar with the ancient world-view in which the Gospels were written may unconsciously disregard elements of the text that would have carried a significant meaning for the early reader and New Testament scholarship may well suffer when such issues are ignored. Hence Mircea Eliade, in his classic study of shamanism, laments:

'Historical-cultural biblical scholars concerned with determining factual, historical events in Jesus' life never attend to his *Mediterranean culture's consensus reality*, which is quite different from *Western culture's consensus reality*'¹⁵

¹³ For an investigation into the Frazerian opinion that magic is 'bad science', coincidence or an emotional reaction, see Lionel S. Lewis, 'Knowledge, Danger, Certainty, and the Theory of Magic', *AJS* 69. 1 (1963) pp. 7-12.

¹⁴ Janowitz observes that "'magic' was not bad because it was fraudulent...magic was dangerous because it *worked*" (Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, p. 3), cf also Howard Clark Kee who states: 'fear of magic attack was not confined to the ignorant' and even highly educated men considered themselves to be open to magical attack (Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, p. 120).

¹⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Technique of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964) p. 105.

The miracles are perhaps the most demanding element of the Gospels for those of us operating under the modern world-view to comprehend for the simple reason, as observed by Bultmann, that modern man will naturally seek an explanation for any unusual or apparently miraculous activity.¹⁶ To engage in a major digression into the philosophical reality of miracles at this point is beyond the scope of this thesis and impractical due to constraints of space, therefore I ask the reader to first concede that the Jesus of the Gospels was a miracle-worker and then transcend this basic assumption to consider whether Jesus employed 'magic' in order to achieve the various miracles that are reported in the Gospels. If it is essential when considering issues regarding 'magic' or 'miracle' that we readjust our particular worldview and situate both concepts firmly within the spiritual world-view of the environment under examination, we must therefore presuppose both the existence of spiritual bodies and the efficacy of healings and exorcisms performed by magicians and miracle-workers. Therefore an extensive debate concerning the reality of angels or demons and the authenticity of allegedly miraculous cures is largely irrelevant for our purpose due to the fact that for a first-century audience both of these phenomena would have been very real and unquestionable. What we must seek to discern, however, is the criterion by which magicians were separated from miracle-workers within the first centuries in order to avoid imposing our own Western, twenty-first century distorted definitions of 'magic' and 'miracle' onto the world of the ancient near East.

¹⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM, 1960) pp. 37-38.

Disentangling the knot of magic and religion

Most studies attempting to ascertain how the ancients defined magic do so by comparing it against its natural foil of religion. The substantive differences, or similarities, between the terms 'magic' and 'religion' is well-trod scholarly ground and it is not easy to establish a clear distinction since the two concepts are often difficult to define within themselves. When faced with the seemingly impossible task of defining one against the other, the individual may feel that he or she is attempting to juggle with water. While the familiar Frazerian classifications used to differentiate between magic and religion are still faithfully defended by some¹⁷, they have been heavily criticised in recent years by scholars keen to show that magic and religion cannot be easily divorced from one another and that 'magic' is a largely Western construct imposed upon cultures that are considered to be uncivilised and irrational.¹⁸

¹⁷ The main defenders of a distinction between magic and religion are E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Walter Grundmann and Hendrik van der Loos. Importantly, John Gager comments that studies intending to show the overlap between the two areas fundamentally assume that the categories of magic and religion are definable within themselves to begin with. (J. G. Gager, 'Introduction', in J. G. Gager (ed.) *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. 25). For a concise overview of the history of the distinction between 'magic' and 'religion', see Lucy Mair, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) pp. 210-31.

¹⁸ Critics of a distinction between magic and religion include David Aune, John M. Hull, A. D. Nock, Harold Remus and Morton Smith. A. D. Nock argues that modern scholars impose their own distinctions between magic and religion and these do not apply to the ancient world (A. D. Nock, 'Paul and the Magus' in *The Beginnings of Christianity* V, ed. F. J. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966) pp. 164-88. Cf. also John Hull who states that 'for the ancient [miracle was] difficult to separate from the category of magic' (Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p.60) and John Dominic Crossan who argues that 'magic and religion cannot be mutually distinguished, in the ancient world or in the modern world' (John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991) p. 305).

Those who believe that we cannot dichotomise between magic and religion tend to appeal to two key arguments. The first proposes that magic and religion are opposing viewpoints of the same activity and the second suggests that the distinction between magic as coercive and religion as petitionary is false as both have elements of the other. We will come to address this second distinction later in this chapter but since the opinion that magic and religion are opposing viewpoints on the same phenomena can trace its source back to the etymological origin of the word ‘magic’, then this is an ideal starting point from which to assess the differences, or lack thereof, between the two.

The rejection of the magi and the condemnation of ‘magic’

The word ‘magic’ and its association with all things supernatural and eclectic emerged from what is essentially a spate of school-yard name-calling. During the Greco-Persian wars (492 – 449 BC), the Greeks encountered the exotic and unfamiliar religious rites of the Persian priests known as the *magi* or *magoi* (or singular, *magus* or *magos*, the Persian word for priest). The *magi* were astrologers, philosophers and diviners and they are commonly thought to have been the priests of the Zoroaster cult¹⁹, although Herodotus in his *Histories* (440 BC) states that they were one of the six tribes of the Medes.²⁰ The Greeks applied the word μάγος or μαγεία to the Persian rituals of the magi as they

¹⁹ E. M. Butler, *The Myth of the Magus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948) pp. 20-2.

²⁰ Herodotus, *Histories* (I and VII). Occasionally the term *magi* was used to refer specifically to a ‘fire-priest’ (see Matthew Dickie, *Magic & Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*. (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 14).

differed considerably from their own religious practices and the title μάγος rapidly became synonymous with exotic or unfamiliar behaviour.²¹ Suspicion regarding the unusual rituals of the magi was exacerbated by the Greek writer Xanthus of Lydus (mid-fifth century BC) who wrote detailing the suspicious practices of the magi to the Greeks and Heraclitus of Ephesus (535-475 BC) who included the magi in a list of individuals accused of promoting a false view of the gods.²² The magi were later denounced by Pliny who in his *Natural History* (77 AD) claimed to expose the ‘fraudulent lies of the magi’ whose ‘art has held complete sway throughout the world for many ages.’²³

The general contempt felt towards these individuals is demonstrated within the New Testament by the character Simon Magus who appears in Acts 8: 9-24 as the supreme example of a *magus* (hence his appropriate surname). Justin Martyr writes that Simon Magus was a magician who performed his miracles with the help of demons and both the *Acts of Peter* and the *Clementine Recognitions* contain extensive condemnation of

²¹ A. D. Nock, ‘Paul and the Magus’, p. 179-81. Janowitz notes: ‘in Greco-roman usage the picture of the *magos* and his *mageia* deviated from the original meaning...it became an umbrella term for any and all suspect uses of supernatural powers.’ (Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, p. 9).

²² Xanthus: See Diogenes Laertes, *Lives* 1.2. Xanthus accuses the magi of practicing incest (see frag. 28, reproduced in C. Müller (ed.), *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* I (Paris, 1841-51)). Heraclitus associated the magi with ‘night-wanderers, bacchants, Lenaeans, mystery-initiates.’ (Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 22.2).

²³ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 30.1. However Pliny is heavily criticised for his inconsistent views on magic. For example, he condemns the use of magic but advocates the use of bizarre healing methods (many of which we will address in Chapter IV) and admits that magic contains ‘shadows of the truth.’ (*Nat. Hist.* 30.6).

Simon's activities.²⁴ In addition, negative opinions regarding the magi may account for the degree of embarrassment felt by many ancient writers regarding the suspicious appearance of 'wise men' (μάγοι) from the East' (Mt. 2:1) who are skilled at astronomy in the birth narrative of the Gospel of Matthew. Although the author of Matthew portrays these characters in a positive light, some early commentators identified these individuals as the magi and attempted to account for their presence in the text. A popular explanation was that Jesus' birth had converted these magicians and freed them from their immoral practices and this interpretation was adopted by Ignatius, Augustine, Origen, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian.²⁵

As the Persian magi endured increasing condemnation, they hastily defended their activities by emphasising their priestly nature and insisting that although their practices were foreign to Greek minds, this did not necessarily make them immoral or illegal.²⁶ Nevertheless the title 'magus' rapidly came to be a term of abuse in the ancient world²⁷

²⁴ Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 26.2: 'There was a Samaritan, Simon...who...did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him.' The *Acts of Peter* describes a contest between Simon Magus and the apostle Simon Peter in which the two demonstrate their miracle-working powers. Simon flies into the air during the contest, but Peter prays for him to fall and Simon falls to his death (*Acts of Peter*, 32). The *Clementine Recognitions* address Simon Magus' alleged activities in depth, detailing his history and his claims to magical power (*Clementine Recognitions*, 2: 5-16).

²⁵ Ignatius accounts for Jesus' triumph over the activities of the magi as follows: 'a star shone forth in the heaven above every other star...every sorcery and every spell was dissolved' (Ignatius, *Eph.* 19. 3). See also Augustine, *Sermons* 20. 3-4; Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.60; Justin, *Dial.* 78.1,7, 9; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3. 9. 2; Tertullian, *De Idol* 9.

²⁶ See A. D. Nock, 'Paul and the Magus', pp. 179-81.

²⁷ Naomi Janowitz points out that 'to call someone a 'magician' during the first three centuries CE was to mount a negative and potentially damaging attack' (*Magic in the Roman World*, p. 1) and that 'mageia solidified into a term of abuse' (p. 6). See also Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) p. 221.

and an allegation of magical practice was made whenever a ritual was foreign or unfamiliar to the observer or was simply considered to be performed with deviant or evil intent.²⁸ In addition to a general mistrust of strange customs or ritual, those subject to suspicion within a community, such as strangers, foreigners, or those with psychological or physical abnormalities, were particularly susceptible to malicious charges of magic. As Marcel Mauss observes:

‘the disabled and the ecstatic, the pedlars, hawkers, jugglers and neurotics...possess magical powers not through their individual peculiarities but as a consequence of society’s attitude towards them and their kind.’²⁹

A general distrust of exotic practices extended to cultures whose religious rites and customs were considered to be strange and suspicious. With its use of hieroglyphs and mummification, Egypt was a prime target for an association with magic in the ancient world and many prominent Greek philosophers, such as Pythagoras and Plato, were thought to have acquired their skills while studying in Egypt.³⁰ It is unsurprising, then,

²⁸ Harold Remus states: ‘the second century use of μάγος, μαγεία, and derivative or related words is almost uniformly negative in the extant Christian sources’ (Harold Remus, ‘Magic or Miracle? Some Second-Century Instances’ *The Second Century* 2:3 (1982) p. 130.

²⁹ Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, p. 28 (for an in-depth study into those in a community who were susceptible to a charge of sorcery, see pp. 27 – 32).

³⁰ Origen states that Egypt contains many practitioners of magic (*Con. Cels.* 1.22, 28, 38, 68). Pythagoras was considered to have acquired the ability to predict the future, heal the sick, command the weather while in Egypt (See Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Pythagoras* III). Similarly, Plato was said to have studied mathematics in Egypt following the death of Socrates and the Latin term *mathematicus* was often translated as ‘astrologer’. For example, the word *mathematicus* is used in this sense by St. Augustine in Book 2 of *De Genesi ad litteram* (early 5thC AD): ‘Quapropter bono christiano, sive mathematici, sive quilibet impie divinantium, maxime dicentes vera, cavendi sunt, ne consortio daemoniorum animam deceptam, pacto quodam societatis irretiant’ (2. 17. 37).

that the first sorcerers encountered in the Old Testament are ‘the magicians of Egypt’ (חרטמי מצרים, Exod. 7:11, 22).

The tension between the two distinctly dissimilar interpretations of the term ‘magus’ in the ancient world had serious consequences for the individual to whom the title was applied. Once the defendant had been identified as a ‘magus’ he was generally considered to be a charlatan who was involved in corruption and immoral activities. However, his followers would defend himself by claiming that he was essentially a decent, moral individual who had been subjected to malicious propaganda from other cultures. The difficulty of establishing a clear distinction was made increasingly difficult by certain individuals, such as Philo, who used the term ‘magus’ interchangeably to refer to both priest and magician. Although the blurring of this distinction made everyday life increasingly problematic for those wishing to distance themselves from magical activity, it also provided a great advantage for magicians seeking to legitimise their operations. For example, the Platonist Apuleius of Madaura (125-180 AD) famously exploited this etymological confusion in his *Apologia sive de Magia*. When accused of practicing magic, Apuleius simply asked his accusers ‘quid sit magus’³¹ and presented three definitions of a magus: a priest, a teacher of magical arts and the more ‘vulgar’ definition of someone who by the use of spells can get what he wants from the gods.³²

Deciding which miracle-working groups or individuals fitted into the categories of religion or magic was largely determined by the socio-political preferences of the

³¹ Apuleius, *Apology* 25. 10.

³² Apuleius, *Apology* 25, 26.

observer and whether the act that they were witnessing was consistent with or foreign to their own personal religious experiences. While people experiencing misfortune in the ancient world appealed to their gods to protect them from hostile supernatural forces and considered these appeals to be religious acts, similar appeals carried out by neighbours could be viewed as magical attempts to manipulate or control supernatural spirits for personal gain. Harold Remus calls this ‘competitions in naming’ and states that whether an act was considered magic was a ‘sociological judgement.’³³ This ‘we-say-you-say’ attitude extended to prominent miracle-workers in the ancient world and their opponents and followers often engaged in bitter disputes to acquit or condemn their opposing heroes. Eugene Gallagher comments on this behaviour in the Hellenistic world:

‘Where the supporters of a given figure would perceive his actions as miraculous, his detractors would see them as magical...the deed which demonstrates divinity for one audience may well demonstrate the malign influence of demons to another.’³⁴

Although the activities of both rival parties may be identical, the practitioner operating within a dominant, official and approved context would often lay claim to divine approval on his activities and condemn the socially deviant outsider as teaching a corruption of religion and colluding with demonic influences.³⁵ Consequently, as John

³³ Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century*. Patristic Monograph Series 10 (MA: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983) pp. 182-183.

³⁴ Eugene V. Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician? Celsus and Origen on Jesus*, SBLDS 64 (CA: Scholars Press, 1982) pp. 32-33.

³⁵ For more on this distinction see Stephen D. Ricks, ‘The Magician as Outsider in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament’ in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) p. 132) and Jacob Neusner, ‘Science and Magic, Miracle and Magic in Formative Judaism: The System and the Difference’ in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, E. S. Frerichs, and P. M. Flesher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 61, 74.

Dominic Crossan concisely states, the distinction between religion and magic is often that 'religion is official and approved magic; magic is unofficial and unapproved religion.'³⁶

Due to its association with demonic and malign forces, magic was deeply entangled with polemics in the ancient world and a charge of magic reared its ugly head wherever there were competitions for power, volatile social situations or the need to scapegoat a mysterious outsider.³⁷ Individuals who did not fall into the social, religious and political norms of the time were often accused of practising magic and suffered severely under legal penalties that were established to eradicate such activities.

Laws prohibiting the practice of magic grew in severity throughout the ancient world and whether the behaviour of an individual was deemed to be religious or magical was often a matter of life or death. The Hebrew Bible contains a clear set of laws prohibiting the practice of magic; Leviticus 19:26 forbids augury and witchcraft, and Deuteronomy 18:10-11 outlaws divination, soothsaying, augury, sorcery, mediums, wizards and necromancers.³⁸ In addition to prohibition under Jewish law, the practice of magic was a criminal offence under Roman law during Jesus' lifetime and strict laws ensured that the

³⁶ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 305. Crossan expands this comment by adding that 'magic is to religion as banditry is to politics' (p. 305) and: 'the spectrum...from religion to magic, or from a son of god, a divine man, a miracle worker, to a magician, is not one of description but prescription, not one of differentiation but of acclamation. And the discriminant is the political one of official, approved, and accepted, as against unofficial, unapproved, or unaccepted activities.' (p. 308).

³⁷ See Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, p. 1, cf. p. 70. Also Versnel: 'accusations of magic could function as a social and political weapon to diabolize and eliminate the opponent' (H. S. Versnel, 'Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion', *Numen* 38 (1991) p. 183).

³⁸ Also, Deuteronomy 13: 1-5 states that a prophet who gives a 'sign or wonder' is punishable by death if he incites his followers to pursue other gods.

magician would be severely reprimanded or even executed if his activities were discovered.³⁹ The ancient Roman legislation known as the Laws of the Twelve Tables (composed in the fifth-century BC) formed an important foundation for all subsequent Roman law and laid down penalties against those who use magical incantations. For example, Table VIII forbids the singing or chanting of evil spells (*malum Carmen incantare* and (*malum*) *Carmen occentare (condere)*)⁴⁰ and prohibits the charming away of crops or another's crops (*fruges incantare, fruges excantare* and *segetem pellicere*).⁴¹ The tablets were destroyed by invading Gauls in 390 BC and consequently the original text of these laws has been lost. However, our knowledge of these laws survives through brief quotations provided in later juridical documents and the writings of other authors.⁴²

As certain individuals suspected of magic, such as Simon Magus (Acts 8:9), were allowed to roam freely then we must assume that these laws were not consistently upheld.

³⁹ 'Sorcery or magic was a serious offense under Roman law at the time of Jesus, especially when it in any way threatened the security of the emperor.' (John W. Welch, 'Law, Magic, Miracle, and the Trial of Jesus', paper given at Society of Biblical Literature (Nov. 2005), Online at: http://www.law2.byu.edu/Biblical_Law/CurrentPapers/MagicSBL1205.pdf. (Last accessed June 2006)) p. 11). Morton Smith notes that the practice of magic was a criminal offence in the Roman Empire since it was considered to be 'social subversion' (Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) p. 221).

⁴⁰ On the interpretation of these first two laws, Clyde Pharr comments: '[these laws] were once interpreted as being directed against personal injury in the form of slander and libel....they were so understood by Cicero, Horace, Festus, Arnobius, Porphyrio, Paulus, and Cornutus. Of late the tendency has been to interpret them as prohibitions of malicious magic.' (Clyde Pharr, 'The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 63 (1932), p. 277).

⁴¹ Clyde Pharr comments: 'All are agreed that...segetem pellicere means to spirit away a neighbour's grain from his field into that of another by means of incantations or other magical charms.' (Clyde Pharr, 'The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law', p. 277).

⁴² Ancient sources for quotations from the Twelve Tables include Aulus, Cicero, Festus, Gaius, Gellius, Paulus, Pliny the Elder and Ulpian.

However, since there was a widespread suspicion that magic acted as a disguise for various political groups which could undermine the authority of Roman or Jewish leaders, if a magician became exceptionally popular or involved himself with subversive politics, particularly within the Hellenistic world, then he would be swiftly dealt with and punished accordingly.⁴³

Constructing the boundaries of magic and miracle

In the light of these stringent laws prohibiting the practice of magic, the loyal followers of miracle-workers were faced with a problem; how to convince the populace that their miracle-worker derived his powers from authorised, approved sources. Even if a clear distinction between magic and religion did not originally exist in the ancient world, there were certainly many individuals busy constructing a distinction in order to avoid persecution and it is these points of contention that separate the behaviours typically associated with the magician from that of the miracle-worker.

Certain groups and individuals proposed definitions of 'magic' that were undoubtedly weak attempts to redefine the word in order to allow them to continue with activities that were otherwise strictly forbidden. For example, the rabbinic leaders in early Judaism were fully aware that their ritual techniques suggested to observers that they had control

⁴³ As Clyde Pharr asserts in his study of magic in Roman law: 'magic often seems to have served as a sort of cloak for seditious and subversive political movements of various kinds.' (Clyde Pharr, 'The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law', p. 279).

over supernatural powers and that this practice was explicitly condemned by the Hebrew bible. Therefore, in order to guard their activities against a charge of magic, the Rabbis simply reinvented a definition of magic and constructed a set of apologetic teachings which allowed them to indulge in their rituals while still condemning the practice of magic by the outsider.⁴⁴ The Sanhedrin stated that performing magic is punishable, while simply *appearing* to perform magic, or creating an illusion of magic, is not an offence ('if one actually performs magic, he is stoned; if he merely creates an illusion, he is exempt', bSanh. 67b). Furthermore, the Sanhedrin claimed that any act which benefited others could not be considered to be magic (bSanh. 67b) and finally, in order to eradicate any suspicions regarding their activities, they added that anyone wishing to join them must be able to perform magic ('none are to be appointed members of the Sanhedrin, but men of stature, wisdom...with a knowledge of sorcery', bSanh. 17a).

Miracle-workers seeking to distance themselves from a charge of magic would often establish a set of characteristics that were typically associated with magical practice in order to demonstrate that their behaviour differed from that of the magician. Although the definitions of magic that were popular in the first centuries may well have derived from these attempts by miracle-workers to entangle their own operations from a charge of magic, three key indicators of magical practice reoccur through antiquity which appear to be crucial factors in how the early magicians *defined themselves*. These three points of

⁴⁴ For more on the Rabbinic definition of magic, see Brigitte (Rivka) Kern-Ulmer, 'The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts: The Rabbinic and Greek Concept of Magic', *JSJ* 27. 3 (1996) pp. 289-303.

separation are as follows:

1. The miracle-worker openly performs his activities in the public sphere, whereas the magician deliberately seeks to cultivate an air of secrecy regarding his operations and imposes privacy upon himself and his initiates.
2. The miracle worker indicates that his god is the active source of his power, whereas the magician often boasts that his ability to produce miracles is the result of his own personal power and/or the correct application of materials and technique.
3. The miracle worker claims that his miracles are performed by God's response to his faithful prayer, whereas the magician boasts that he merely commands the gods and they obey him.

These three key areas, which we will now address in greater detail below, demonstrate that certain forms of 'magical' behaviour were deliberately fostered by the magician himself rather than imposed upon him by the disapproving and suspicious society in which he operates. Therefore, although the original *magi*-cians may have been innocent priests who were the unfortunate victims of malicious gossip, contemporary scholarship must appreciate that the word 'magic' has since been applied to individuals who clearly exhibit behaviour that is contrary to the pious and prayer-like nature of these Persian figures. We should not readily assume that the confusion surrounding the term *magi*

acquits all subsequent *magi*-cians from practicing anything contrary to the central principles of religion.

The self-imposed, anti-social behaviour of the magician

The first point upon which ancient magic appears to *define itself* is in its inclination towards secretive and private behaviour. We have previously considered that magicians were forced to remain solitary and secretive figures within a society as they were subjected to torment and persecution by the dominant religious and socio-political movements of the time. However, this theory is turned on its head by evidence which reveals that in many cases the magicians of the ancient world *deliberately* isolated themselves from mainstream religion and exhibited anti-social, deviant behaviour entirely through personal choice. While the religious individual is content to participate in public worship *en masse*, the magician is often identified by his rejection of conventional religious activities and his tendency to carry out his activities away from public speculation.⁴⁵ Since the practice of magic was deliberately excluded from the mainstream social sphere of organised religious worship, Marcel Mauss defines a magical rite as:

‘any rite which does not play a part in organized cults – it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of a prohibited rite’ (Mauss’ emphasis).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ David Aune suggests that ‘magic is defined as that form of religious deviance whereby individual or social goals are sought by means alternate to those normally sanctioned by the dominant religious institution’ (David E. Aune, ‘Magic in Early Christianity’, *ANRW* 2.23.2, p. 1515).

⁴⁶ Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, p. 24.

The motivations driving a magician to maintain secrecy concerning his operations are commonly accounted for by four main theories. First is the Durkheimian theory which assumes that whereas the religious person engages in continual acts of devotion focusing on long-term aims that benefit the community as a whole, the magician aims to achieve specific goals for the immediate needs of the individual and therefore he has no need of a communal worship group.⁴⁷ A second possible explanation is that commitment to an established belief system is difficult for the magician since if his spell fails to work he will modify his technique and alter the names of the gods that he is addressing in order to discover a more effective way of achieving instant success.⁴⁸ Thus the efficacy of the method takes precedence over loyalty to a specific deity and this is evident in the numerous combinations of names of Jewish, Christian, Egyptian, Greek divinities found within the magical papyri. A third possibility is that secrecy was imperative to the magician in order to conceal magical techniques or incantations which, if heard by others, would evidently incur a charge of magic and risk the ensuing legal penalties. Finally,

⁴⁷ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1915) pp. 43-45. Malinowski supports this theory by stating that whereas religion aims to achieve broad, long term goals, magic attempts to meet immediate, practical needs (Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1948) pp. 67-70).

⁴⁸ Carla Sframini points out that 'the magician used as many names as possible to have more power' (Carla Sframini, 'Magic Syncretism in the Late Antiquity: Some Examples from Papyri and Magical Gems', *Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* 6 (2001) p. 191). Under the heading 'the conventional image of the sorcerer', Georg Luck concludes that 'when [the magician] fails he modifies his techniques' and 'since he cannot rely on a common faith (the gods will help you sooner or later) instant success is everything to him' (Georg Luck, 'Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature' in V. Flint, R. Gordon, G. Luck and D. Ogden (eds.) *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe vol. 2 (London: Athlone Press, 1999) p. 106).

secrecy may have been maintained by the magician in order to imbue his activities with a general air of mystery and thereby make his knowledge attractive to potential initiates. As Matthew Dickie notes:

‘[the secrecy of magic] is in part imposed on it from outside by those who disapprove of it, but it also imposes secrecy on itself, so that the sense of opposition, exclusiveness and illicitness may be fostered. If it is something that can be freely practised and becomes an activity in which everyone can expect to attain expertise, it loses its allure. The magician performs his ritual in secrecy, partly because he has to keep up the pretence that he has access to a special and exclusive body of knowledge.’⁴⁹

Although the private and secretive nature of the magician implied to his audience that he was engaging in deviant behaviour,⁵⁰ most often the magician was willing to impose this suspicion upon himself and risk speculation in order to conceal his activities from the authorities or even feed his own ego by implying that his knowledge was too exclusive to be shared publicly.

The combination of natural and spiritual magic within the Greek Magical Papyri

A failure to recognise the variety of different methods incorporated into the operations of the single magician in antiquity has been responsible for a great deal of confusion in

⁴⁹ Matthew Dickie, *Magic & Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 40.

⁵⁰ For example, Clyde Pharr concisely states: ‘the secrecy and mystery of magical rites and the mere fact that magic was an individual rather than a collective undertaking and that it did not come out into the open, as did most religious ceremonies, convinced the people that it employed unlawful and impious means.’ (Clyde Pharr, ‘The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 63 (1932) pp. 278-279).

countless studies of ancient magic. The presence of an address directed towards a spiritual being in a magical text has led many a scholar to follow Frazer's misguided assumption that the text in question cannot be describing a magical ritual as such procedures require the application of technique alone and disregard any need for spiritual aid.⁵¹ As a result, magic is often classified as the employment of physical technique and religion is defined as an appeal to the spiritual power of the gods and an inaccurate distinction is proposed on this basis. For example, Howard Clark Kee states that the difference between magic and miracle is one of personal technique versus divine will:

‘If the technique is effective of itself in overcoming a hostile force, then the action is magical. If it is viewed as the intervention of the god or goddess, then it is miraculous.’⁵²

Although this distinction is often vehemently defended in anthropological thought⁵³, it is very difficult to apply this theory to the magical texts which comprise the larger part of our understanding of magical ritual in the ancient Hellenistic world. Since spells detailing the technical application of materials exist alongside lengthy petitions to gods in the Greek magical papyri, I would urge the student of ancient magic to appreciate that

⁵¹ This distinction was originally proposed by Edward Burnet Tylor (*Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (1865)) and later adopted by Frazer (*The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1911)).

⁵² Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, p. 4. Grundmann also argues that magic is the belief in an impersonal magical power (*mana*) whereas the religious man has a personal deity (Walter Grundmann, ‘δύναμις/δύναμις’ in *TDNT* vol 2, pp. 306, 310, 312).

⁵³ For example, Beals and Hoijer write: ‘religion...involves, among other things, belief in supernatural beings, whose actions relative to man may be influenced and even controlled. Magic, on the other hand, presupposes a rigid relation of cause and effect, unaffected by supernatural beings.’ (Ralph L. Beals and Harry Hoijer, *An Introduction to Anthropology* (New York: Macmillan, 1959) p. 553).

although the precise use of physical techniques may on occasion suggest that spiritual elements are not present in certain magical rituals, it is incorrect to conclude that spirits or gods are absent from *all* magical ritual and propose a dissimilarity with religion on this basis alone. Whenever spiritual bodies can be discerned within a magical text they are most often addressed with a strong element of manipulation and magical intent, therefore the presence of a spiritual being is entirely consistent, rather than incompatible, with magical practice. To highlight these two parallel forms of magical methodologies it is useful to distinguish between *natural magic*, in which the magician uses techniques that are applied independently of supernatural aid, and *spiritual magic*, which exploits the gods and inferior supernatural powers. However it is essential that both methods are recognised as equally fundamental aspects of ancient magic.

Natural magic: personal power and the importance of technique

Miracle workers in the early centuries attempted to distance themselves from a charge of magic by emphasising their dependence on prayer, underlining the role of God's will in their wonderworking and accusing the magicians of sidelining the will of God by using techniques that were effective *ex opere operato*. The magician's occasional reliance upon physical technique, rather than spiritual petition, is demonstrated by the numerous magical texts from antiquity which require the operator to possess knowledge of a specific procedure and/or materials which must be applied precisely in order to produce

an automatically successful result. Many spells in the Greek magical papyri instruct the magician to carry out the instructions of the rite precisely; if it is performed correctly then instantaneous results are guaranteed but if the procedure is carried out improperly then the act will be unsuccessful.⁵⁴ Furthermore, as the intermediary presence of a deity or powerful spiritual being is not required, the performer's standing with God is unimportant and anyone who masters the instructions described within a magical text can potentially recreate the outcome.⁵⁵ A staunch confidence in the immediate effectiveness of a procedure was therefore considered to be a major indicator of magical practice and the immediacy of results ensured that many magicians throughout history generated a monetary profit from selling their services, especially those who had cleverly restricted the exclusiveness of their services by maintaining secrecy regarding their precise techniques.⁵⁶ Since a major catalyst for the successful completion of the procedure was

⁵⁴ For example, David Aune: 'goals sought within the context of religious deviance are magical when attained through the management of supernatural powers in such a way that results are virtually guaranteed' (David E. Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity', p. 1515). In his set of four main characteristics that can be applied to magic, Versnel explains: 'if all the instructions are observed, there is an expectation of direct results.' (H. S. Versnel 'Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion', *Numen* 38 (1991) p. 179). Similarly, Eli Edward Burriss notes that 'the person performing the rite wills a certain effect which is bound to ensue if the magic act and the incantation have been flawless. The violation lies with the person.' (Eli Edward Burriss, 'The Magic Elements in Roman Prayers', *CPh* 25. 1 (1930) p. 48).

⁵⁵ Kee writes: 'magic is primarily concerned with what procedures work and its results do not depend on qualities of the performer or a relationship with the divine' (Howard Clark Kee, 'Magic and Messiah' in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 123). Similarly, Plotinus states that spells function through the sympathetic manipulation of natural forces, therefore there is no need for intermediary demons or 'a will that grants' (Plotinus, *Enneads*, 4. 4. 40).

⁵⁶ Georg Luck argues that the sorcerer is 'motivated by greed and by his desire to gain prestige and status' (Georg Luck, 'Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature', p. 104). Likewise, Philostratus suggests that magicians are solely concerned with financial gain (*Life of Apollonius*, 7.38).

the performer's ability to employ his various techniques correctly, the magician would often exhibit a tendency to amass knowledge of techniques from various sources in an attempt to swell his repertoire of successful methods.⁵⁷

The absence of a supernatural influence within these procedures raises an important question for the study of natural magic; what is the power-source behind these operations if it is not spiritual? An answer to this question was proposed by anthropologists in the first quarter of the twentieth-century who had observed that the magical techniques of certain cultures were evidently effective by the will of the magician alone and independently of any spiritual intervention. Studies revealed that these techniques were successful due to an impersonal and natural power thought to reside within the physical environment or even within the magician himself and this power-source was classified as *mana*. We will explore the origins and applications of *mana* later in Chapter IV, however the presence of this impersonal, in-dwelling type of energy within ancient magic demonstrates that the source of the magician's ability to perform magic was not inevitably drawn from the spiritual or godly realm, but also from his skilful employment of natural energies.

⁵⁷ This is demonstrated by the high degree of syncretism in the Greek magical papyri. John Hull comments: 'the art of magic is to collect such knowledge and apply it correctly so as to swing the enormous forces of the universe in the desired direction' (John Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, pp. 37-8).

Spiritual magic: the coercive will vs. the supplicatory prayer

Whenever a spiritual agency was considered to be the power-source behind an individual's magical operations, his opponents would predictably declare that this underlying power was demonic or that the magician had somehow coerced his god into performing impossible acts at his request. Most often this latter allegation was well-founded since the magician's impersonal relationship with the gods, his expectation of immediate results and, as R. Marett observes, the degree of 'must' that is involved in magic⁵⁸ ensured that a demanding and coercive tone was typically employed by magicians practicing spiritual magic in the ancient world.⁵⁹ Certainly the majority of the incantations directed towards deities in the magical papyri have a strongly coercive aspect and Sharyn Echols Dowd in her study of the domineering will of the magician provides many examples of the arrogant nature of the magician in antiquity. For example, in a formula to compel the moon the magician commands his god:

'you have to do it, whether you want to or not (τὸ δεῖνα πράξεις κἂν
θέλης κἂν μὴ θέλης)'.⁶⁰

The fear and obedience with which the gods responded to a magician's incantations is demonstrated by Dowd who cites Lucan's portrait of the witch Erichtho as a typical

⁵⁸ R. R. Marett, 'From Spell to Prayer', *Folklore* 15. 2 (1904) p. 146.

⁵⁹ On the coercive nature of magic in the Greek Magical Papyri, Kee observes: 'what is sought is not to learn the will of the deity, but to shape the deity's will to do the bidding of the one making the demand' (Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic*, p. 112).

⁶⁰ Sharyn Echols Dowd, *Prayer, Power and the Problem of Suffering* (SBLDS 105, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) p. 139, citing text from T. Hopfner, "Mageia," *PW* 14/1 (1930) p. 344. This is, of course, rather a paraphrase of the Greek text quoted. A closer translation would be: 'you will do it, whether you want to or not'.

example of the coercive behaviour of the magician and the subsequent fearful response from the gods. In his description of the witch's ritual, Lucan states that 'no sooner had she stated her demands than the gods granted them, for fear of being subjected to a second spell'⁶¹ and consequently Dowd comments that this account 'serves as a literary example, written a decade or less prior to the Gospel of Mark, of the widespread opinion that magic served to impose human will on deity.'⁶² Threatening the gods is particularly associated with ancient Egyptian magical practice. Janet H. Johnson observes that 'threats against gods who might fail to do what one wants go back to the earliest Egyptian religio-magic literature'⁶³ and in his study of ancient Egyptian magic, E. A. Wallis Budge states:

'the object of Egyptian magic was to endow man with the means of compelling both friendly and hostile powers...even God Himself, to do what he wishes, whether they were willing or not.'⁶⁴

Accordingly, miracle-workers who were eager to separate their activities from those of the magicians countered allegations of magic by drawing attention to the coercive behaviour of the magician and emphasising the functional aspect of their prayers in order to illustrate that their results were ultimately reliant on God's will.⁶⁵ Hence the rabbinic

⁶¹ Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6. 527-528.

⁶² Dowd, *Prayer, Power and the Problem of Suffering*, p. 140.

⁶³ Janet. H. Johnson, 'Introduction to the Demotic Papyri' in Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, p. lvii.

⁶⁴ E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (New York: Bell, 1991) p. xiii.

⁶⁵ On the submissive nature of prayer, see Michael Brown who comments that 'in the ordinary understanding of prayer, a petition can either be accepted or rejected' (Michael Joseph Brown, 'Panem Nostrum': The Problem of Petition and the Lord's Prayer', *JR* 80. 4 (2000) p. 595). Also Friedrich Heiler: 'the social relation in which the praying man stands to God is one of subordination and dependence.' (Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (Oxford: Rockport, 1997) p. 59).

tradition was quick to distinguish Honi and Hanina from their contemporary magicians by indicating that their results were dependent upon prayers which were heard and subsequently answered by God and therefore their moral standing with God was the efficacious element in their operations. Similarly, although Apollonius of Tyana, a Neo-Pythagorean miracle-worker and contemporary of Jesus, was accused by his enemies of being a magician and twice arrested under suspicion of practicing magic, his biographer Flavius Philostratus (170-247 AD) recorded that Apollonius was a pious man who prayed to God and did not perform acts by his own personal power (although incidentally, the Greek magical text PGM. XIa 1-40 is entitled 'Apollonius of Tyana's old serving woman' and provides the magician with instructions to summon the spirit thought to have served Apollonius).⁶⁶

In view of this defensive emphasis on prayer and the miracle-workers' forthright condemnation of manipulative magical techniques, a distinction is proposed by some, notably by James Frazer, between the religious man who accepts that his fate is at the mercy of spiritual powers that are beyond his persuasion and henceforth supplicates the divine through respectful prayers in order to request the god's compliance in undertaking a task, and the magician who believes that the will of the gods can be manipulated by

⁶⁶ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, IV. 44. Philostratus claims: 'I have gathered my information partly from the many cities where [Apollonius] was loved, and partly from the temples whose long-neglected and decayed rites he restored, and partly from the accounts left of him by others and partly from his own letters' (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, I. 2). However, the reliability of Philostratus' account is questionable since this is an apologetic work intended to defend Apollonius against a charge of magic and some scholars date it as late as the third century. Nevertheless, Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* remains the primary source of information regarding the life of Apollonius of Tyana and although the historical reliability of this account is uncertain, Philostratus clearly considered the use of prayer to be an effective defence against a charge of magic.

adopting coercive, demanding behaviour and engaging in protracted speeches, most often employing threats, to force the gods to perform a task or even work under his command.⁶⁷ Certainly this is the most controversial case for a distinction between religion and magic and it has been heavily criticised by scholars keen to demonstrate that certain magical texts contain prayer-like imprecations and religious texts occasionally veer towards a coercive nature. David Aune, for example, argues that 'it is difficult if not impossible to establish a phenomenological distinction between magical incantation and religious prayer' as 'magic not infrequently supplicates while religion not infrequently manipulates supernatural powers.'⁶⁸

In defence of a distinction between prayer and incantation, others suggest that the presence of isolated prayer forms or sentences of a subservient nature in a spell do not necessarily indicate that the overall intention of the spell was supplicatory. While both

⁶⁷ See James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3rd ed. (London: MacMillan & Co., 1911). The difference between religious prayer and coercive magic is identified by N. Söderblom who writes: 'in religion, man reveres divinity; in magic, man makes use of divinity to his own advantage' (N. Söderblom, *Der lebendige Gott im Zeugnis der Religionsgeschichte: nachgelassene Gifford-Lektüren* (Munich: E. Reinhardt, 1942) p. 33, cited by Thomas C. Römer 'Competing Magicians in Exodus 7-9' in Todd Klutz (ed.) *Magic in the Biblical world: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, JSNTsupp 245 (2003) p.12). See also A. A. Barb who comments that while the religious man is submissive, the magician attempts 'to force the supernatural powers to accomplish what he desires and avert what he fears' (A.A. Barb, 'The Survival of the Magic Arts' in Arnaldo Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) p. 101). In a set of four main characteristics that are applied to magic 'outside the field of anthropology', Versnel writes that the second is the magician's 'attitude'. Versnel states: 'magic is essentially manipulative...Religion views man as dependant upon powers outside his sphere of influence. This entails an attitude of submission and supplication. The opposition is between 'instrumental, coercive manipulation' and 'personal, supplicative negotiation' (H. S. Versnel, 'Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion', *Numen* 38 (1991) p. 178).

⁶⁸ Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity', p. 1513.



prayer and incantation often appear alongside one another in the magical papyri, as Leuba suggests, they ‘combine but never fuse’.⁶⁹ This is due to the fact that although both forms of address may share the same verbal channels to communicate with supernatural forces, they remain clearly separated on the basis of the performer’s *intention*, i.e. whether the performer is placing him/herself at God’s mercy and allowing that deity the discretion to do as it chooses, or whether he or she is expecting to receive immediate results and seeking to restrict the manoeuvrability and autonomy that God has in performing the act. As Eli Edward Burriss observes in the case of Roman prayers:

‘if there is any difference between [prayer and incantation] it lies not so much in the prayer or in the incantation as such but in the attitude of mind of the person toward the object of his incantation or prayer and in the consequent change in tone, and, in a limited degree, in the form of the incantation.’⁷⁰

To judge whether a spoken address to a god is essentially a prayer or incantation, the words themselves must be separated from the intent behind them, much in the same way that Jewish prayer distinguishes between *keva*, the spoken words, and *kavanah*, the intention or emotion underlying the words. We must appreciate that although the line of communication may be opened up in the same way, the message may be different. For example, consider the image of two people playing a piano. The first plays jazz and the second plays a Chopin nocturne. The instrument that is played and the printed notation that is read are similar, but it is the pianist’s *intention* to utilise a specific technique of musical genre that determines the difference in the resulting sounds. Certain texts within the Greek magical papyri which appear to incorporate prayer-like imprecations to the

⁶⁹ J. H. Leuba, *The Psychological Origin and the Nature of Religion* (London: Constable & Company, 1915) pp. 65ff.

⁷⁰ Eli Edward Burriss, ‘The Magic Elements in Roman Prayers’, *CP* 25. 1 (1930) p. 47.

gods often betray the magician's underlying *intent* to coerce the god or further his own personal power. For example, two lines in a bowl divination in PGM IV. 198-199 begin by suggesting a prayer-like approach:

‘O grant me power, I beg, and give to me
This favour - ’

However the immediately subsequent lines reveal that this initially submissive address conceals the underlying intention of the magician to persuade the god to grant the magician the ability to call on the gods whenever he wills:

‘- so that, whensoever I tell
One of the gods to come, he is seen coming/
Swiftly to me in answer to my chants.’⁷¹

The reader of the magical texts produced in antiquity must be aware that not only do these texts demonstrate a high degree of syncretism by combining the names of numerous gods from various religious traditions, but there is also an extensive variety of speech styles and manners of address that have been incorporated into the texts in a bid to determine which forms of incantation are more effective. The overall portrait of the magician which emerges, from the study of Hellenistic magic in particular, is of an individual scrabbling around on the religious and magical scrapheap of various cultures for the mention of materials, techniques or the names of gods that will add power to his spell. Therefore, prayer-like elements may have been incorporated into spells by individuals who rejected the aggressive, coercive language that was typically found in

⁷¹ The combination of subservient prayer and an underlying persuasive request is also present in PGM III 107: ‘Hearken to me as I pray to you, that you may perform the NN [deed], because I invoke you by your names’.

magical texts and considered a subtle approach to their gods to be a more effective form of magical manipulation. Since spiritual coercion occasionally took this softer, more persuasive approach, I would suggest that it is often necessary to refer to spirit *manipulation* rather than spirit *control* when considering the ancient magician's approach to his gods or spirits.



We have now highlighted three definitive characteristics of magic which arise from the study of magical practices and behaviour within the ancient world. The first is self-imposed secretive and anti-social behaviour, the second is the use of physical techniques that are effective *without* the aid of spiritual powers (i.e. natural magic) and the third is the ability to command a supernatural agent, often in a coercive manner, to obey the will of the petitioner (i.e. spiritual magic).

Before we resume our exploration of each of these three major areas in greater depth, we must now consider whether these attributes have informed the various allegations that Jesus was a magician. Due to the negativity that the term 'magician' carried in the ancient world, it was almost invariably a third person designation applied by one's enemies and therefore we should not expect to find the title as a means of self-identification.⁷² On the

⁷² Jonathon Z. Smith asserts: "magic"...is almost always a third-person attribution rather than a first-person self-designation...' (Jonathon Z. Smith, 'Trading Places' in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Boston: Brill, 2001) p. 18). See also Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, p. 3.

contrary, when determining whether a miracle-worker was considered to be a magician it is useful to examine the materials produced by his opponents since, although these writings may be tainted by polemical discourse, they may also include valuable information that was not recorded by his followers for fear of humiliation or persecution.

Jesus the magician: hearing the charges

A brief glance over the polemical materials which circulated in response to the spread of early Christianity reveals a sinister figure that appears time and time again; Jesus the magician. Although both the opponents and followers of Jesus recognised his abilities as a miracle-worker, they strongly disagreed on the source behind his miraculous powers. While Christian discourse stated that Jesus' abilities resulted from his direct relationship with God, anti-Christian propaganda denied a divine source of Jesus' powers and accused him of performing magic. Initially the followers of Jesus responded by fervently emphasising the divine source of his miraculous powers and as Christianity flourished and became increasingly mainstream, the opportunity grew for the new dominant Christian group to distance their hero from these allegations of magic and the voices of those who opposed Jesus gradually died away. Since a charge of magic was a popular polemical device employed against enemies in the ancient world, these stories may simply have been malicious rumours constructed by the hostile opponents of Christianity. Nevertheless, the damage caused by these allegations was far from minor and inconsequential as they had penetrated deep into the tradition and even infiltrated the

Gospel materials themselves, prompting many a Christian apologist, and Gospel writer, to engage directly with these rumours and address them as serious accusations rather than frivolous conjecture.

Most charges of magic that are found within the various polemical works tend to present a vague argument which lacks a clear explanation of the behaviours or words within the reports of Jesus' life that were considered to bear magical connotations. Occasionally the charge is made a little more explicit and it is from these informative accounts that we can hope to construct an understanding of the elements of Jesus' behaviour that warranted these seemingly outlandish claims. Vague fragments of charges of magic can be recovered from various cultures which have come into contact with the Jesus tradition; for example, the Mandaean literature describes Jesus as a magician and identifies him with the Samaritans. Equally the Quran provides an account of Jesus' healings, raisings from the dead and his ability to make birds from clay and adds that 'those who disbelieved among them said: This is nothing but clear enchantment' (5.110).⁷³ The majority of allegations are found within the Jewish tradition and the Christian apocryphal and apologetic texts, but the strongest charges are ultimately those made within the Gospels themselves.

⁷³ This story is similar to that found in *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, in which Jesus fashions twelve sparrows out of clay which fly away (*The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, II).

Charges of magic in the Jewish tradition

By the beginning of the second century AD, Jewish tradition had firmly woven an accusation of Jesus' magical activity into its anti-Christian polemic. The *Tract Sanhedrin*, the fourth tractate of the fourth set of six series which comprise the Mishnah (compiled in the second century AD) and later included in the Babylonian Talmud (compiled in the sixth century AD), contains an intriguing passage in which Jesus' hurried trial, as reported in the Christian Gospels, is extended to a period of forty days to allow people to step forward and defend him.⁷⁴ As a defence fails to emerge, the passage states that Jesus was executed as a sorcerer:

‘On the eve of the Passover Yeshu [Jesus] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy.’ (Sanhedrin 43a)

The Talmudic claim that Jesus performed his miracles using magic, along with reference to his illegitimate birth and a shameful death, may simply be Jewish-Christian polemic intended to damage Jesus' reputation and therefore the historical accuracy of this story is questioned. However, the Talmud contains two further references to Jesus and the practice of magic. The first is contained within the concluding line of Sanhedrin 107b which reads:

‘The Teacher said: ‘Yeshu practiced sorcery and corrupted and misled Israel.’

⁷⁴ For more on these passages in the Talmud, see Raymond E. Brown, ‘The Babylonian Talmud on the Execution of Jesus,’ *NTS* 43 (1997) pp. 158-59.

It is difficult to relate this sentence to the Historical Jesus himself as the story in which this statement is situated is set in the century before Jesus lived and the name 'Yeshu' was particularly common at the time. Nevertheless, this final line suggests that the story came to be associated with rumours of Jesus' exploits that were in general circulation. The second allegation of magic within the Talmud states that Jesus learned magic in Egypt and cut magical formulas into his skin:

'Did not Ben Stada bring forth sorcery from Egypt by means of scratches on his flesh?' (Shab. 104b)

Initially the source of this Egyptian influence appears to be the Matthean account of Jesus' stay in Egypt (Mt. 2:13-23). However, since Egypt was traditionally associated with magic in the Jewish tradition then it is possible that this story arose independently of Matthew's Gospel and was invented by Rabbis seeking to discredit Jesus by associating him with Egyptian magic.⁷⁵ Furthermore, scratching symbols on the flesh was not a particularly common practice within ancient magic, although mention of the magical use of tattoos does occur in later Christian magical texts.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Egypt is mentioned several times in the Talmud in association with magic. For example, b. Qiddushin 49b states that of the ten measures of witchcraft that came to the world, nine were given to Egypt.

⁷⁶ For example, the magical text entitled 'Spell of summons, by the power of god's tattoos (Rylands 103)' reads: 'in the name of the seven holy vowels which are tattooed on the chest of the father almighty'. A similar statement is found in London Oriental Manuscript 6794 ('Spell to obtain a good singing voice'): 'I adjure you in the name of the 7 letters that are tattooed on the chest of the father' (Translations from Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith (eds.) *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) pp. 231, 280).

Charges of magic in Christian apologetic and apocryphal material

Ironically, allegations of Jesus' magical activities owe their survival in part to early Christian apologists who provide reference to the Jewish accusations that Jesus was a magician and thereby demonstrate that these charges were a common polemical tool in the ancient world. Tertullian and Justin Martyr are particularly vocal when discussing the charge in the second century; Tertullian explains that the Jews called Jesus a 'magus'⁷⁷ and Justin Martyr writes in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 160 CE) that the Jewish witnesses to Jesus' miracles considered him to be a sorcerer:

'For they dared to call Him a magician (μάγος) and a deceiver (πλάνος) of the people.'⁷⁸

Similarly, the fourth-century Christian writer Lactantius wrote in his *Divinae Institutiones* that the Jews accused Jesus of performing his miracles through magical means, although Lactantius unfortunately does not elaborate on the grounds for these accusations.⁷⁹ The fourth-century Christian apologist Arnobius helpfully provides an additional detail in his description of the Jewish allegations by stating that Jesus was accused of stealing the 'names of the angels of might' from the Egyptian temples.⁸⁰ The magical employment of names also appears in a story recounted in the *Toledoth Yeshu*, a medieval polemical report of the life of Jesus. In the *Toledoth*, Jesus learns the 'Ineffable Name of God' and the knowledge of this name allows its user to do whatever he wishes.

⁷⁷ Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.17; 23.7, 12.

⁷⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 69. 7.

⁷⁹ Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 4.15; 5.3.

⁸⁰ Arnobius, *Against the Gentiles* 43. 1.

Jesus writes the letters of the name on a piece of parchment which he inserts into an open cut on his leg and removes with a knife when returning home. When the people bring a leper to Jesus, he speaks the letters of the name over the man and the man is healed. When they bring a dead man to Jesus, he speaks the letters of the name over the corpse and the man returns to life. As a result of his miraculous powers, Jesus is worshipped as the Messiah and when he is eventually executed he pronounces the name over the tree upon which he is hung and the tree breaks. He is finally hung on a tree over which he does not, or is unable to, pronounce the name. In addition, Morton Smith mentions an 'obscure curse by a Palestinian Rabbi' from the third century which states: 'Woe on him who makes himself alive by the Name of God' (Sanhedrin 106a) and Smith suggests that 'this may reflect the belief that Jesus did his miracles and even raised himself from the dead by magical use of the divine Name, the greatest of all spells.'⁸¹

The New Testament apocryphal works compound these charges of magic by including stories which portray Jesus as engaging in typical magical behaviour. For example, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* depicts Jesus as a child performing a variety of magical feats; he models sparrows out of clay which fly away (2:2, 4) and even uses his power for destructive ends, such as killing his fellow children (3:3; 4:1) and blinding whoever opposes him (5:1). This destructive use of Jesus' power is feared to the extent that 'no one dared to anger him, lest he curse him, and he should be crippled' (8:2) and Joseph urges to his mother 'do not let him go outside the door, because anyone who angers him dies' (14:3). Positive applications of Jesus' power are demonstrated in the healing of a young man and a teacher (10:2; 15:4), the raising of the dead (9:3; 17:1; 18:1), the curing

⁸¹ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 49.

of his brother James' snakebite (16:1), the filling of a broken jug with water for his mother (11:2) and the miraculous extending of a piece of wood in order to help his father make a bed (13:2).

Accusations of magic made in the apocryphal materials often imitate and elaborate on those made by the Jewish people in the apologetic material discussed above. For example in the *pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* the scribes shout out: 'the signs and miracles which your Jesus wrought, he wrought not as a prophet, but as a magician.'⁸² Similarly in the *Acts of Pilate* the Jewish people state that it is 'by using magic he does these things, and by having the demons on his side'⁸³ and they claim that Jesus is a sorcerer since he is able to send Pilate's wife a dream.⁸⁴ The narrative also has the chief priests echo the words of Mk. 3:22/Mt. 12:24/Lk. 11:15 with a more explicit charge of magic:

'They say unto him: He is a sorcerer, and by Beelzebub the prince of the devils he casteth out devils, and they are all subject unto him.'⁸⁵

The charge of magic made by Celsus

One of the most detailed allegations of magic is the charge made by Celsus, a pagan philosopher writing in the late second century. Although we do not have Celsus' original text, the philosopher and theologian Origen set out to refute many of the central tenets of Celsus' *True Doctrine* in his apologetic work *Contra Celsum* and since he generously

⁸² Clement, *Recognitions of Clement* I. 58.

⁸³ *Acts of Pilate*, 1.1

⁸⁴ *Acts of Pilate*, 2.1

⁸⁵ *Acts of Pilate*, 1.1

quotes from Celsus' text it is possible to reconstruct his argument from Origen's citations alone. A fervent critic of Christianity, Celsus did not doubt that Jesus was a miracle-worker but he attempted to reinterpret his life as that of a magician, referring to him as a γόης (1.71) and claiming that Christians used invocations and the names of demons to achieve their miracles (1.6). Celsus also echoes the allegations made by the Talmud regarding Jesus' early infancy in Egypt, suggesting that Jesus stayed there until his early adulthood and it was during his stay in Egypt that he acquired his magical powers:

‘After she [Mary] had been driven out by her husband and while she was wandering about in a disgraceful way she secretly gave birth to Jesus... because he was poor he [Jesus] hired himself out as a workman in Egypt, and there tried his hand at certain magical powers on which the Egyptians pride themselves; he returned full of conceit because of these powers, and on account of them gave himself the title of God.’⁸⁶

When addressing Celsus' comparison between Jesus and the Egyptian magicians, Origen quotes at length from Celsus' fantastical description of the illusionary tricks and bizarre magical methods employed by these magicians:

“who for a few obols make known their secret lore in the middle of the market-place and drive out demons and blow away diseases and invoke the souls of heroes, displaying expensive banquets and dining-tables and cakes and dishes which are non-existent, and who make things move as though they were alive although they are not really so, but only appear as such in the imagination.’ And he says: ‘since these men do these wonders, ought we to think them sons of God? Or ought we to say that they are the practices of wicked men possessed by an evil demon?’”⁸⁷

The concluding lines of this quotation from Celsus raise a question that is of central importance to our present study; if other magicians were actively engaging in activities

⁸⁶ Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.28.

⁸⁷ Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.68.

similar to those attributed to Jesus in the Gospels, then how are we to separate the miracles of Jesus from the wonders produced by these magicians?

A charge of magic within the Gospels: was Jesus executed as a magician?

There are two central allegations of magic made against Jesus by his opponents within the Gospels. The first is the Pharisees' claim that Jesus is in possession of a demonic spirit through which he performs his miracles (Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15) and the second is Herod's suggestion that Jesus possesses the soul of John the Baptist (Mt. 14:2//Mk. 6:14-29). Each of these charges require a thorough explanation of the belief-systems and popular superstitions that were characteristic of the ancient world-view in order for us to fully appreciate the weight that these charges would have carried for the early reader and therefore an examination of the allegations made within each of these passages will be postponed until Chapters VI and VII. However some scholars have proposed that a third charge of magic can be discerned in the terminology used in the trial narratives of the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Matthew and therefore we must consider whether an allegation of magic is present in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' trial.

All four Gospel authors agree that Jesus was brought before Pilate on the indictment that he had blasphemed against God and professed to be the Messiah. Although a formal charge of magic is not explicitly made in the trial accounts of the Gospels, some scholars suggest that allegations of magical practice may have influenced the trial proceedings or that the terminology used by the Gospel writers reveals that an official charge of magic is

present within the text. For example, Morton Smith proposes that when the Jewish people accuse Jesus of being a *κακοποιός* ('evildoer', Jn. 18:30) this term is generally understood as referring to someone who is illegally involved in magical activity. Smith supports this theory by indicating that 'the Roman law codes tell us that ['a doer of evil'] was the vulgar term for a magician' and he quotes from *Codex Justinianus* IX. 18. 7 which mentions 'Chaldeans and magicians (*magi*) and the rest whom common people call 'men who are doing evil' (*malefici*).'⁸⁸ Smith also suggests that the word could refer to someone who encouraged the worship of false gods, a practice that would naturally incur a charge of magic. By translating the Greek term *κακοποιός* into its Latin equivalent 'malefactor', some scholars indicate that this latter term is clearly a technical expression for a magician⁸⁹, however Graham Twelftree concludes that the expression *κακοποιός* is used throughout the New Testament with the sense of 'evildoer' (1 Peter 4:15) and therefore 'there is no evidence for the use of *κακοποιός* in the sense of 'magician' in Greek legal terminology.'⁹⁰

A second potential charge of magic is founded upon the use of the term *πλάνος* in Matthew 27:62. The word is typically translated as 'deceiver' or 'impostor' and it is often used to refer to evil spirits; for example, the demon Beliar is identified as a 'deceiver' in

⁸⁸ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 33. Smith reiterates this point on p. 41: "Doer of evil,' as the Roman law codes say, was common parlance for 'magician.'" In addition, John W. Welch points out that '*κακοποιός* is one word that not only carries the meaning of magic, but has an inescapably negative connotation' (John W. Welch, 'Law, Magic, Miracle, and the Trial of Jesus' (p. 17), paper given at Society of Biblical Literature (Nov. 2005), Online at: http://www.law2.byu.edu/Biblical_Law/CurrentPapers/MagicSBL1205.pdf. (Last accessed June 2006)).

⁸⁹ See Welch, 'Law, Magic, Miracle, and the Trial of Jesus', p. 16.

⁹⁰ G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) p. 203.

the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*⁹¹ and the term is even applied to Satan himself in Revelation 12:9. The presence of *πλάνο*s in Mt. 27:62 with specific reference to Jesus has led certain commentators, Father J. Samain and Morton Smith in particular, to suggest that the term *πλάνο*s is to be interpreted here as ‘magician’.⁹² Morton Smith therefore translates Mt. 27:62 as: “that magician, while yet alive, said, ‘After three days I shall arise.’”⁹³ Some scholars, such as David Aune, agree with the theory originally proposed by Samain that Matthew’s use of *πλάνο*s within this passage conclusively proves that Jesus was accused of being a magician⁹⁴, however others strongly disagree. Graham Twelftree criticises a translation of *πλάνο*s as ‘magician’ by re-examining the use of the term in Josephus, upon which Samain’s argument is largely based.⁹⁵ Twelftree concludes that the original use of the word was to ‘lead astray’ and therefore the term in Mt. 27:62 simply means ‘impostor’ or ‘deceiver’ and does not infer any magical connotations.⁹⁶ I would suggest that deception and magic were very closely related concepts in the ancient world and this accounts for Celsus’ association between the practice of magic and the performance of illusions when describing the activities of the Egyptian magicians who conjure up banquets which are ‘non-existent’ and make things appear alive ‘although they are not really so, but only appear as such in the imagination.’⁹⁷ In addition, the correlation between magic and deception is made explicit in the *Acts of Peter* by those

⁹¹ *Testament of Benjamin*, 6:1.

⁹² J. Samain, ‘L’accusation de magie contre le Christ dans les Evangiles’, *EphTL* 15 (1938) pp. 449 – 90.

⁹³ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 42.

⁹⁴ David Aune believes that Samain’s argument is ‘an iron-clad case’ (Aune, ‘Magic in Early Christianity’, p. 1540).

⁹⁵ Samain, ‘L’accusation de magie’, p. 462.

⁹⁶ Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 202.

⁹⁷ Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.68.

who accuse Paul of being a ‘sorcerer’ and ‘a deceiver’⁹⁸ and Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* states that the Jewish people called Jesus ‘a magician (μάγος) and a deceiver (πλάνος) of the people’.⁹⁹

Regardless of whether the word ‘magician’ or any equivalent euphemism is used by the Gospel authors in the charges brought against Jesus at his trial, the very nature of the trial narratives within the Gospels indicates that the participants were fearful of Jesus’ magical potential. John W. Welch suggests that the fears and superstitions regarding magic and supernatural powers that were held by both the Jews and Romans explains their united condemnation of Jesus and accounts for why the trial was such a hurried affair.¹⁰⁰ The Mishnah specifies that trials at night are illegal and cannot take place before a festival (Sanhedrin 4:1), therefore, if these laws were effective at the time of Jesus’ trial, to hold proceedings at night and on eve of the Passover (Mk. 14:1-2, 12; Jn. 18:28) would have been strictly forbidden under Jewish law.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the chosen method of execution does not correlate with a charge of blasphemy. The Talmud specifies stoning as a punishment for practicing magic (Sanhedrin 67b), but the Johannine trial narrative states that the Jews sought to stone Jesus because he claimed that ‘I and the Father are one’ and was therefore guilty of blasphemy (Jn. 10:30-31). The association between stoning and

⁹⁸ *Acts of Peter* IV. cf also ‘Simon has used magic and caused a delusion’ (XVII).

⁹⁹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 69. 7.

¹⁰⁰ John W. Welch, ‘Law, Magic, Miracle, and the Trial of Jesus’, pp. 20 – 22.

¹⁰¹ The illegality of holding a trial or hearing, particularly involving capital punishment, at night or on the eve of a Sabbath or festival is addressed in Joseph B. Tyson, ‘The Lukan Version of the Trial of Jesus’, *NovT* 3 (1959) pp. 252-253. Tyson argues that these laws were effective at the time of Jesus’ trial and he draws on evidence presented by Herbert Danby in ‘The Bearing of the Rabbinical Criminal Code on the Jewish Trial Narratives in the Gospels’, *JTS* 21 (1920) pp. 54-55.

the charge of blasphemy is reinforced by the subsequent statement: 'it is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you being a man, make yourself God.' (Jn. 10:33). If a charge of blasphemy was made against Jesus, then why was this usual method of execution rejected in favour of crucifixion? John Welch recognises this problem and concludes that a verdict of crucifixion may have been passed as an emergency measure based on a fear of magic. Welch states that 'on an emergency charge involving fear of demons, Jewish law was capable of putting someone to death by crucifixion'¹⁰² and he cites an example from the Talmud in which eight witches are reported to have been crucified 'without proper trials, because the court saw the case as a matter of emergency.'¹⁰³ Due to the urgent and possibly illegal nature of the trial and the ruling that Jesus should be crucified rather than stoned, Welch concludes:

'In the end, Jesus was put to death by a few people who became irrationally afraid primarily because of his open association with and apparent use of the supernatural'¹⁰⁴

The seemingly pervasive fear of Jesus' supernatural power that is present in the trial narratives of the Gospels suggests that charges of magic were rife within Jesus' lifetime and they may even have contributed to his eventual execution. Furthermore, while the allegations of magic made by certain individuals, such as Celsus for example, could be dismissed as malicious anti-Christian propaganda, these accusations of magic are

¹⁰² John W. Welch, 'Law, Magic, Miracle, and the Trial of Jesus', p. 22. Welch draws further evidence from Paulus who states that in Roman law 'those who know about the magic art shall be punished with the highest penalty; they shall be thrown to the beasts or be crucified' (Welch citing F. H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Chicago: Ares, 1996) p. 276).

¹⁰³ See Sanh. 45b-46a.

¹⁰⁴ John W. Welch, 'Law, Magic, Miracle, and the Trial of Jesus', p. 23.

recorded by the Gospel writers themselves who are actively seeking to further the Christian message. Since it is unlikely that the evangelists would willingly invent a charge of magic, we may assume that they were fully aware that their early readers would be familiar with these allegations, hence their unavoidable inclusion in the Gospel narratives. The fact that certain allegations of magical practices remain in the Gospel materials as an 'unavoidable inclusion' not only indicates the extensive nature of these rumours but also raises the possibility that these allegations may have been based on authentic, first-hand observations made by those witnessing the behaviour of the Historical Jesus. Therefore, having considered the various allegations of magic made against Jesus which derive largely from the materials produced by the opponents of Christianity, we will now turn to examine the Gospel narratives themselves to discern whether they contain evidence of magical techniques employed by Jesus that have survived the editorial process, perhaps due to the early reader's familiarity with Jesus' use of these techniques.

To ensure that we are correctly identifying behaviour within the Gospels that would have carried connotations of magical practices for a first-century audience, we will return to the three main characteristics of ancient magic that have been established earlier in this chapter and use these as a 'magical yard-stick' against which we can compare the Gospels materials with the typical behaviour of the magician in antiquity. To begin this process, we will address the first of our three major indicators of magical activity and compare the *behaviour* of the magician, namely his self-imposed secrecy, against the suspiciously secretive behaviour of Jesus within the Gospels.

CHAPTER III

PEARLS TO SWINE: THE MESSIANIC SECRET IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SECRECY IN ANCIENT MAGIC

‘We hear of another man, Theodoras, who tried to make fun of a Hierophant [of the Greek Mysteries] by asking him: “Explain to me, Eurykleides, who are those who are impious in the eyes of the gods?” Eurykleides replied, “Those who expose the secrets to the uninitiated.” Theodoras countered, “You are an impious man, you also, since you give explanations to a person who is not initiated.”’

~ G. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (1974) pp. 225-6 ~

Although remnants of the messianic secret are found in the later gospels, the author of Mark in particular envelopes Jesus’ ministry in a shroud of secrecy and has Jesus repeatedly demand silence when engaging with demons (Mk. 1:25, 34, 3:12), the healed (Mk. 1:43-44, 7:36, 8:26) and his disciples (Mk. 8:30, 9:9). Since the evangelist does not provide an obvious explanation for this constant appeal to secrecy, it is possible that he naturally assumed that his readers would understand why this high degree of confidentiality was necessary. However, if the importance of secrecy within these passages was obvious to the early reader, then it appears to have eluded the authors of Matthew and Luke who are both seemingly confused regarding the purpose of this recurrent secrecy motif and/or uncomfortable with its presence in the Markan narrative and prefer instead to omit the silence commands from their received texts. One example

of this is Luke's omission of the command to silence given by Jesus to the disciples following the transfiguration (Mk. 9:9). Rather than repeating the command to silence found in the Markan account of the transfiguration, the author of Luke implies that the disciples kept silent voluntarily rather than in obedience to Jesus' strict command (Lk. 9:36).

The question of why the Historical Jesus ordered his patients and disciples to maintain secrecy regarding his activities and hesitated to make an open messianic claim, or equally the motive behind the evangelist's invention of the messianic secret, remains a riddle in New Testament scholarship. Most theories tend to engage directly or indirectly with William Wrede's influential study which proposes that, methodologically, Mark's Gospel should be approached as a creation of its author and therefore there is a strong possibility that the secrecy theme is a Markan invention.¹ If this is so, then what significance did the evangelist intend the messianic secret to have for the reader? For Bultmann, it is a simple literary device used by the author of Mark to weave his material into a coherent whole.² Other studies suggest that since the Jewish people expected a warrior or king-like messiah, most Jews would have been disappointed by Jesus or rejected him altogether and consequently the author of Mark may have incorporated the messianic secret into his

¹ I must emphasise that Wrede only *suggests* this theory since he personally did not consider the author of Mark to be the creator of the secrecy theme. Wrede believed that 'material of this kind is not the work of an individual' (W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1971) p. 145). For a full summary and critique of Wrede's theories, see David E. Aune, 'The Problem of the Messianic Secret', *NT 11* (1969) pp. 1-8.

² R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) p. 348ff.

Gospel as an apologetic device to explain why Jesus failed to fulfil the role of the messianic figure anticipated by the Jewish people.³

A number of additional theories have been proposed by scholars who oppose the recurrent secrecy theme as a Markan invention and seek to trace the messianic secret back to the Historical Jesus. The simplest of these explanations is that Jesus' failure to openly reveal his messianic identity was a consequence of his own modesty or personal insecurities. However, it is difficult to agree that humility was the impetus driving the secrecy commands given by Jesus, particularly those directed to the healed, as this is not consistent with the harsh and urgent tone with which Jesus addresses them. For example, Jesus 'sternly charges' (ἐμβριμησάμενος) the leper not to tell anyone about his healing in Mk. 1:40-45 and Bultmann comments that it is 'possible to link this up with the emotion of anger.'⁴ Severe commands to silence are also given to Jairus and his wife in Mk. 5:35-43 and to Peter in Mk. 8:30.

Alternatively, many commentators suggest that the significance attached to silence in Jesus' ministry is directly related to the revelation of his messianic status. When demons shout out Jesus' name and origin (Mk. 1:24, 5:7) and his true identity is made known to the disciples (Mk. 8:30, 9:9), the command to silence that follows on both occasions is

³ Oscar Cullmann traces the messianic secret back to the Historical Jesus and suggests that Jesus did not use the title 'Messiah' because he did not agree with contemporary Jewish ideas of the messiah. (O. Cullmann, *Peter. Disciple - Apostle - Martyr* (London: SCM, 1953) p. 171ff. Also Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1959) p. 122). Cf. M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* trans. Betram Lee Woolf, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1971) p. 223, 230f) and D. E. Aune, 'The Problem of the Messianic Secret', *NovT* 11 (1969) p. 9.

⁴ R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 37.

often understood as a preventative measure to avoid the public exposure of Jesus' divine nature. Information regarding Jesus' true identity may have been purposefully withheld from the public for a variety of reasons. First, a messianic statement would have carried substantial revolutionary implications and therefore a public revelation may have been avoided in order to prevent a disturbance and thereby draw the attention of the authorities.⁵ In accordance with this theory, Vincent Taylor proposes that Jesus' emphasis on silence may have developed from a concern that reports of his messiahship would reach the Romans who would begin to interfere with his mission.⁶ Second, Wrede draws attention to Mk. 9:9 and suggests that Jesus wished his true messianic identity to remain hidden until after the resurrection.⁷ Making a messianic claim too early in Jesus' career may have detracted from the significance of the resurrection, thereby effectively spoiling the punch-line of any post-crucifixion revelations.

There are, however, considerable difficulties which arise when accounting for Jesus' injunctions to silence as a 'messianic' secret. First of all, the 'messianic' secret stumbles over its own terminology in the charges addressed to the demoniacs in Mk. 1:25 and 3:12. The demoniacs do not address Jesus as the 'messiah' but as the 'Son of God', a term which Oscar Cullmann argues is not identical with 'Messiah'.⁸ Therefore the subsequent commands to silence cannot be intended to protect Jesus' 'messianic'

⁵ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952) p. 377. Also Aune, 'The Problem of the Messianic Secret', p. 9.

⁶ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 123.

⁷ Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, p. 67ff, cf. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 346.

⁸ O. Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, p. 279ff.

identity. Second, it is highly implausible that the secrecy commands are intended to protect Jesus' identity by concealing his miracles from public speculation as the author of Mark tells us that Jesus healed and exorcised in the presence of large crowds. For example, Mark states that the healings attracted a 'great multitude' (Mk. 3:7-10) and crowds begin to gather during the exorcism in Mk. 9:25. It is unlikely that Jesus silenced patients who had received a healing or exorcism in order to protect his identity as speculation regarding Jesus' identity would surely have arisen naturally amongst the large group of witnesses to the miracle. Furthermore, Jesus even openly reveals his identity to the crowds on one occasion (Mk. 2:10), thereby demonstrating that withholding his true identity from the public was not a major concern.

If the commands to silence in Mark's Gospel faithfully reflect the words and actions of the Historical Jesus and a) these commands did not result from personal modesty, b) these commands did not guard against a public revelation of Jesus' messianic identity, and c) Jesus performed his miracles in front of large crowds and even openly reveal his identity to them, then there must be an alternative explanation for the Historical Jesus' constant appeals to secrecy. I would suggest that further insights into the purpose of these secrecy commands can be gained by examining the behaviour of another figure in the ancient world who deliberately generated an aura of secrecy around himself and regarded secrecy concerning his actions to be of paramount importance; the magician.

The importance of secrecy in magic

John P. Meier comments that a defining characteristic of magic is that it ‘has a secret, esoteric nature’⁹ and Marcel Mauss suggests that the secretive nature of magic is a distinguishing factor which clearly separates it from religion:

‘Where religious rites are performed openly, in full public view, magical rites are carried out in secret. Even when magic is licit, it is done in secret, as if performing some maleficent deed. And even if the magician has to work in public he makes an attempt to dissemble: his gestures become furtive and his words indistinct...Isolation and secrecy are two almost perfect signs of the intimate character of a magical rite.’¹⁰

An emphasis on secrecy is apparent in the recipes of magical instruction within the Greek magical papyri, which repeatedly implore the magician to maintain secrecy concerning his actions and stress the importance of keeping the technical aspects of the rite private and away from public scrutiny. For example, a magical text in the Berlin papyrus (PGM I) urges the performer to ‘conceal (κρύβε), conceal the [procedure]’ (I. 41) and ‘share this great mystery with no one [else], but conceal (κρύβε) it’ (I. 130). Similarly, in ‘a spell for dream revelations’ in the Great Magical Papyrus of Paris (PGM IV), the author of the text urges the practitioner on two occasions to ‘keep it secret (κρύβε)’ and ‘keep it secret, son (κρύβε, υιέ)’ (IV. 2510-2520). The phrase ‘keep it secret’ also appears in the same papyrus in a ‘spell for revelation’ (PGM IV. 75-80) and a ‘charm of Solomon’ (PGM IV. 920-925). Silence is also an important element of these rites and the magician is

⁹ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 1st ed., 3 vols., The Anchor Bible Reference Library, vol. 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 548-50.

¹⁰ M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) p. 23.

frequently ordered to 'keep silent' (PGM III. 197, 205) or 'perform it...silently' (PGM III. 441). The reader of these magical texts is faced with the same questions that are raised regarding the secrecy theme in the Gospel of Mark; why is it so imperative that the actions of the performer are kept secret? And what are the consequences should these secrets be divulged?

While there have been countless investigations into the activities of secret groups within various societies and the effects of secrecy upon social interaction, there has been very little research into the role and motivational objectives of the individual who possesses the secret, in this case that of the magician.¹¹ As a result, the function of secrecy in the operations of the magician must be gleaned from a close examination of the importance of secrecy in the magical papyri and the ancient magical tradition in general. The results of this investigation reveal that the magician's underlying motives when concealing his actions appear to vary according to the contact group with whom he is engaging and whether the individual or members of that group are permitted to observe the magician's rituals and/or have authorised access to his knowledge or whether they must remain uninformed and unaware of his activities. Since the rationale behind the magician's secretive behaviour appears to vary according to his audience, it is possible to discern a pattern in the function of secrecy in ancient magic from which three distinct contact groups emerge; the magician's initiates, the magician's opponents and the general public.

¹¹ Studies into the effects of secrecy and secret groups on society include G. Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. K. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950); E. Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy* (New York: Free Press, 1956); S. Bok, *Secrets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); B. L. Bellman, *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984).

First, secrecy is encouraged when recruiting new initiates for the simple fact that by restricting access to his 'secret' knowledge, the magician thereby increases the attractiveness of this knowledge to potential new members. Second, secrecy has a defensive purpose as it protects the magician from conflict with his enemies. Since the practice of magic carried severe legal penalties in antiquity, the magician would not seek to draw attention to his activities as he would risk a charge of magic being brought against him by his opponents. Finally, the magician frequently adopts secretive behaviour when operating in view of the public not only as a preventative measure against a legal charge of magic but also to preserve the exclusivity of the technical aspects of his rituals and to ensure that his methods are not replicated by his audience.

Whether the secrecy theme in the Gospel of Mark has a singular function or can be divided into similar categories is a question raised by Wrede. It is Wrede's understanding that each of the commands to silence in Mark's Gospel are employed in a similar way and therefore we should consider them as having a unified purpose.¹² Ulrich Luz disagrees and divides the messianic secret into two separate classifications; the 'miracle secret' and the messianic secret.¹³ The 'miracle secret' is concerned with Jesus' divine nature, whereas the messianic secret is concerned with the person of Jesus and comes to prominence in Jesus' silencing of the disciples and the demons. Jurgen Roloff progresses this division even further and divides the secrecy commands into three functions,

¹² Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, p. 37.

¹³ Ulrich Luz, 'The Secrecy Motif and the Marcan Christology' in C. M. Tuckett (ed.) *The Messianic Secret* (London: SPCK, 1983) pp. 75-96.

separating the commands to silence directed towards the demons from the commands to silence addressed to the disciples.¹⁴

I would suggest that Jesus' use of secrecy in Mark's Gospel corresponds almost identically to the magician's use of secrecy when engaging with the three main contact groups of his initiates (the disciples), his opponents (the demons) and his public (the healed). The motivations driving the magician to maintain secrecy when confronted with these groups might help to shed some light on why the author of Mark presents Jesus as constantly demanding secrecy regarding his activities and concealing his identity from the disciples, the demons and the healed.

Silence as a method of increasing the desirability of knowledge

By maintaining confidentiality regarding his operations, the magician appears to withhold secret knowledge from the public and thereby creates a sense of mystery surrounding his knowledge which makes it increasingly attractive to new initiates and in turn intensifies the power of the secret.¹⁵ In addition to providing a desirable incentive to the curious observer, Luhrmann suggests that the magician deliberately fosters secrecy in order to accord himself a degree of control over those who do not have access to his private

¹⁴ Jurgen Roloff, 'Das Markusevangelium als Geschichtsdarstellung', *EvTh* 27 (1969) p. 84ff.

¹⁵ For example, T. M. Luhrmann states: 'Magicians elicit feelings of awe and defence toward the hidden knowledge by implying that the secrets are too powerful to be made public' (T. M. Luhrmann 'The Magic of Secrecy' *Ethos* 17. 2 (1989), p. 139). In addition, Breslau comments: 'Magic offers a private, secret knowledge, a whispered spell that only the initiates can know' (S. D. Breslau, 'Secrecy and Magic, Publicity and Torah' in P. Mirecki (ed.), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) p. 281).

knowledge.¹⁶ Once the magician has established a close group of 'followers' or 'apprentices' who have access to his special knowledge, the importance of secrecy is often impressed upon the collective members of this group and studies into the behavioural norms of secret groups have revealed that the possession of hidden knowledge and the exclusion of 'outsiders' closely unites those within the circle of knowledge, with members typically exhibiting great trust in one another, developing a strong sense of the 'insider' and 'outsider' and even acquiring a new vocabulary.¹⁷

A clear division between insider and outsider, those who possess knowledge and those who are without knowledge, is made by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. This distinction is deliberately fostered by a series of didactic parables which are intended to be incomprehensible to the general populace who must remain as outsiders that 'may look, but not perceive, and may listen, but not understand' (Mk. 4:12). Poetic or unusual language was also employed by practitioners of ancient magic who sought to disguise certain words or techniques from the uninitiated, hence the intense use of cryptography and mathematics to encrypt secret words. For example, both PGM LVII and LXXII are standard cryptograms and PGM XII. 401-44 is a list of materials that have been given secret names in order to prevent the public from copying the magician's techniques. The

¹⁶ 'Secrecy is about control. It is about the individual possession of knowledge that others do not have. . . . That which is hidden grows desirable and seems powerful' (T. M. Luhrmann, 'The Magic of Secrecy', p 161).

¹⁷ Georg Simmel observes that 'the intensified seclusion against the outside is associated with intensification of cohesion internally' (G. Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. K Wolff (New York: Free Press 1950), p. 369). Simmel adds: 'the strongly emphasized exclusion of all outsiders makes for a correspondingly strong feeling of possession.' (Simmel, *Sociology*, p. 332). For more on the acquisition of a new vocabulary in secret groups, see S. Bok, *Secrets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

author of this list in PGM XII states 'because of the curiosity of the masses they [i.e., the scribes] inscribed the names of the herbs and other things which they employed on the statues of the gods, so that they [i.e., the masses]...might not practice magic' (XII. 401-405). Then follows a list of secret names and their corresponding objects, including 'a snake's head: a leech', 'crocodile dung: Ethiopian soil', 'lion semen: human semen' and 'blood of Hestia: camomile'.¹⁸

While the author of Mark tells us that the crowds must remain ignorant concerning the real meaning of Jesus' parables, the true teaching is subsequently revealed to the disciples (Mk. 4:33-34). There are many occasions in which Jesus withdraws from the crowd with his disciples to give secret instruction (Mk. 5:11, 7:17-23, 9:28-32, 13:3ff) and as we will discover in Chapters IV and VIII in particular, some of these teachings clearly have magical connotations. The division between outside and insider is made evident in Mk. 4:11 in which Jesus says: 'to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables.' Schuyler Brown suggests that 'the secret of the kingdom of God' that appears in Mk. 4:11 (cf. Mt. 13:11, Lk. 8:10) and is granted to the disciples through secret instruction is not to be understood as Jesus' secret messianic identity, since the disciples do not fully comprehend this until Peter's statement 'you are the Christ' in Mk. 8:29.¹⁹ By singling out the disciples to receive secret teachings, restricting public access to his knowledge and referring to his teachings as 'secrets', the

¹⁸ For more on the 'coding' of magical recipes, see Lynn R. LiDonnici, 'Beans, Fleawort, and the Blood of a Hamadryas Baboon: Recipe Ingredients in Greco-Roman Magical Materials' in P. Mirecki, *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) pp. 366f.

¹⁹ Schuyler Brown, 'The Secret of the Kingdom of God. Mark 4:11', *JBL* 92. 1 (1973) p. 63.

Markan Jesus implies that the disciples are privy to special knowledge and immediately 'insider' and 'outsider' groups are created. Jesus holds the key to this knowledge and he is able to unlock the secrets for the disciples (quite literally in the case of Mt. 16:19).²⁰ This cycle of secrecy also appears in Matthew's Gospel as Jesus urges the disciples that they should keep their special knowledge confidential and engage in solitary prayer ('but whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you', Mt. 6:5-6).

The secretive nature of Jesus' prayers within the Gospels, along with the fact that the disciples are also urged to adopt this private method of prayer, suggests that the Gospel writers intended the reader to understand that Jesus' spoken words were not intended for public hearing and therefore these prayers could not form part of communal, public worship.²¹ This is surprising since we have previously established that secretive, anti-social behaviour and the rejection of public worship are behaviours that were typically associated with deviancy and magic in the ancient world (see Chapter II). For example, Pieter W. van der Horst states in his study of silent prayer that 'in antiquity prayers were said out loud and silent prayer was regarded as an anomalous practice that was looked

²⁰ In *the Gospel of Thomas* the promise of revealed knowledge is extended to include not only the disciples, but also everyone who reads and understands the words of Jesus. For example, saying 108 of *The Gospel of Thomas* reads: 'He who drinks from my mouth will be as I am, and I will be he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him.' The 'I will be he' indicates that when the individual 'drinks' from the wisdom of Jesus, the spirit of Jesus will enter into that individual. In this case, Thomas has become 'like Jesus' by correctly interpreting his words and it follows that these 'hidden' things will be revealed to him.

²¹ With particular reference to the teaching in Mt. 6:6, Van der Horst states: 'the fact that one should withdraw to a place where one is alone would rather seem to suggest that one should look for a place where one's prayer, spoken out loud, cannot be heard by others' (Pieter W. van der Horst, 'Silent Prayer in Antiquity', *Numen* 41. 1 (1994) p. 17).

upon with great suspicion.’²² By teaching in parables, speaking about revealed knowledge, engaging in secretive prayer and encouraging others to do the same, the picture of Jesus that begins to emerge is reminiscent of the magician in antiquity who uses secrecy as a means of fostering allegiance and creating insider/outsider groups.

The concealment of magical activity and personal identity from enemies

Although secret knowledge can be attractive to outsiders, it can also foster jealousy in those who, rather than attempting to learn the magician’s secrets, will mock the magician, ascribe his powers to evil spirits, attempt to use his powers against him, or seek to punish him under the laws prohibiting magic. The magician’s conflict with political authorities will be addressed below, however it was equally important that the magician concealed his actions from his ‘magical rivals’ and fellow magicians. If a ‘magical rival’ towards whom a spell or curse was directed became aware that he had been subjected to a spell, it was feared that he may try to overcome or reverse it.²³ Worse still, if an enemy was to overhear the words of a spell, they too may be able to perform the same incantation and thus the exclusivity of the magician’s knowledge would be nullified or his magical techniques may even be used against him.

²² Van der Horst, ‘Silent Prayer in Antiquity’, p. 1.

²³ For instance, Faraone states that in order for binding spells to be successful they must remain secret from the people towards whom they were directed. (C. A. Faraone, ‘The Agnostic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells’ in C. A. Faraone and Obbink, D. (eds.) *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p. 11ff). Cf. van der Horst, ‘Silent Prayer in Antiquity’, p. 2ff.

In addition to concealing his *activities* from his 'magical rival', the magician would also attempt to conceal his *identity*. The notion that secret names and identities possess immense power is a magical motif that is consistent throughout the ancient world. For example, the possession of the name of a god, angel or demon was thought to grant the bearer immediate control over that particular spirit and the ability to manipulate it, harm it or harness the spirit as a power-source for various operations such as exorcism or healing.²⁴ For this reason, ancient magicians used biblical names and various titles for God in their incantations whenever they required divine assistance and Origen mentions the use of powerful names amongst the Egyptians, the Magi in Persia and the Brahmins in India, concluding that this 'so-called magic is not...an altogether uncertain thing', but rather it is 'a consistent system'.²⁵ Instances of secrecy regarding the names of gods and spirits are found throughout the Old Testament. For example, Moses asks the angel at the burning bush for Elohim's name (Ex. 3:13-14), Manarah inquires of the name of the angel of the Lord to which the angel replies 'why do you ask my name, seeing it is secret' (Judg. 13:18) and while wrestling with the 'man' at Peniel, Jacob asks 'Tell me, I pray, your name' (Gen. 32:29). The magical virtue of the name was particularly prevalent in ancient Egypt where it formed the basis of more than half of the religious ideas.²⁶ E. A.

²⁴ Stevan Davies agrees that 'to gain the name of the possessing entity would, it was commonly believed in the ancient world, give one controlling power over that entity.' (Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer* (London: SCM Press, 1995) p. 281). On the prevalence of this notion in cultural anthropology, Malinowski states: 'the belief that to know the name of a thing is to get a hold on it is thus empirically true' (B. Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their magic* vol. 2. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press 1965) p. 233).

²⁵ Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.24.

²⁶ E. A. Wallis-Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (New York: Bell, 1991) p. 137f.

Wallis Budge writes that the ancient Egyptians believed that 'the name was as much a part of a man's being as his soul'²⁷ and he observes that names were often used in magical rituals:

'The Egyptians, like most Oriental nations, attached very great importance to the knowledge of names....it was believed that if a man knew the name of a god or a devil, and addressed him by it, he was bound to answer him and to do whatever he wished; and the possession of the knowledge of the name of a man enabled his neighbour to do him good or evil.'²⁸

The legend of how Isis stole the name of Ra, the Egyptian god of the sun, is the most infamous use of a magical name in ancient Egyptian mythology. In this story Isis knows that possession of the secret name of Ra would give her an incredible amount of magical power. In order to steal it from him, she creates a serpent from Ra's spittle which bites him and makes him sick. She then persuades Ra to reveal his name so that she can cure him and when he does so, he immediately places himself completely in her power.²⁹

In accordance with this principle, secret names were highly guarded in antiquity and not pronounced for fear that enemies would use the name for counter magic.³⁰ This accounts for the rumpelstiltskin-esque air of secrecy adopted by magicians regarding their true

²⁷ Wallis-Budge, *Egyptian Magic*, p. 157.

²⁸ Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic*, p. 157.

²⁹ The original text of this story was found on a papyrus preserved in Turin and first published in W. Pleyte and F. Rossi, *Papyrus de Turin* (Leiden, 1869-76). The text was later translated by E. A. Wallis Budge in his *Legends of the Gods* (London: Kegan Paul, 1912) pp. 42-55 and Sir James G. Frazer refers to this story in his study *The Golden Bough* when discussing the tabooeness of the names of gods (*The Golden Bough*, 22.5).

³⁰ For an example of this notion in primitive cultures, see James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 22. 1 ('Personal names tabooed').

identities and the common practice of giving secret names to new initiates in mystery religions in order to protect them from hostile magic.³¹

The ancient magician's motives for withholding his true identity from his enemies have direct implications for Jesus' silencing of the demoniacs in Mk. 1:21-28 and Mk. 5:1-13. Although the demoniacs correctly identify Jesus on both occasions and attempt to expose his true nature, parallels between the terminology used in these Gospel accounts and similar phrases found within the magical papyri suggest that these aggressive outbursts are not strictly concerned with the revelation of Jesus' identity to the surrounding observers, but they are also attempts to use their knowledge of Jesus' name and origin as a magical technique through which to gain control over him.

The demoniac's use of Jesus' identity in the Capernaum synagogue (Mk. 1:24-28)

The demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum in Mk. 1:24 addresses Jesus with three short statements which, when taken as a whole, are intended as an apotropaic defence against Jesus' attempted exorcism. Upon encountering Jesus, the demoniac cries out τί ἔμην ἐμοί καὶ σοί;, a question which corresponds to the Semitic phrase מַה־לִּי וְלָךְ.³² Similar questions appear throughout the Old Testament; for example, the widow in 1 Kings 17:18 rebukes Elijah with the words 'what have you against me? (מַה־לִּי וְלָךְ).'³³

³¹ For examples of this behaviour in contemporary magical groups, see Luhrmann, 'The Magic of Secrecy', p. 140.

³² The LXX parallel to Mk. 1:24 has τί ἔμην καὶ σοί.

³³ For further examples of this type of address, see Josh 22:24, Judg. 11:12., 2 Sam. 16:10, 19:23; 2 Kgs. 3:13; 2 Chr. 35:21; Jer. 2:18, Hos. 14:9 and Jn. 2:4.

I would suggest that in light of the Old Testament usage of this phrase in the confrontational dialogue between opponents, the words of the demon in Mk. 1:24 are to be understood as a defence mechanism used to ward off Jesus.³⁴ However, I would add that the demoniac's statement is not merely a defensive endeavour, but the first in a series of appeals to common magical techniques in an attempt to gain control over Jesus.

To begin with, although the phrase in Mk. 1:24 is commonly understood as 'why are you bothering us?', since both are in the dative case it is probably more correct to translate the question literally as 'what to us and to you?'. This interpretation is similar to the formula of mutual identity which appears in the Greek magical papyri whenever a magician is seeking to gain control over a spiritual power:

'For you are I, and I, you (σὺ γὰρ εἰ ἐγὼ καὶ ἐγὼ σὺ). Whatever I say must happen, for I have your name as a unique phylactery in my heart, and no flesh, although moved, will overpower me...because of your name, which I have in my soul and invoke' (PGM XIII. 795)

A further example of this formula is found in a fourth-century rite known as the 'Binding Spell of Astrapsoukos' (PGM VIII.1-63). When invoking Hermes in this text, the magician declares 'for you are I, and I am you (σὺ γὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ ἐγὼ σὺ); your name is mine, and mine is yours' (PGM VIII. 36).

The second part of the demoniac's statement concludes with a direct identification of Jesus by revealing his name and place of origin (Ἰησοῦ Ναζαρηνέ, Mk. 1:24). In addition

³⁴ This interpretation is mentioned briefly in O. Bauernfeind, *Die Wörter der Dämonen im Markusevangelium* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1927) p. 3-28.

to the magical use of Jesus' name, the combination of the location 'Nazareth' along with the name is highly significant as it not only serves to concentrate the focus of the demon's words onto the person of Jesus, especially since the name 'Jesus' would have been common during the period³⁵, but it is also a technique that has many parallels in the ancient magical tradition. When seeking to control a spirit or human, it is equally important that the magician states the *origin*, either geographical or parental, of the victim in order to conclusively establish their identity. For example, in the 'binding love spell of Astrapsoukos' (PGM VIII. 1-62) the magician declares 'I know you Hermes, who you are and where you are from and what your city is: Hermopolis' (VIII. 13) and when a spell is to be directed towards a specific individual in the Greek magical papyri, the name of the person's mother is often stated to the same effect, i.e. *N*, son of *N*.³⁶ An indication of Jesus' origin appears to function in a similar fashion in Mt. 21:11, albeit with a positive rather than negative intent, when the crowds identify Jesus by stating 'this is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee'.

The second statement made by the demoniac (ἦλθες ἀπόλεσαι ἡμᾶς;) illustrates the demon's familiarity with Jesus' previous exorcistic activity and thereby serves as a further indication of the extent of the demon's knowledge regarding Jesus. To complete his defence, the demoniac cries out οἶδά σε τίς εἶ. Many spells within the magical papyri require the magician to elaborate at length concerning the spirit over whom he is

³⁵ Cf. Collossians 4:11, Josephus, *Ant.*, 15. 9. 3; 17. 13. 1; 20. 9. 1; *Bel. Jud.*, 3. 9, 7; 4. 3. 9; 6. 5. 5

³⁶ This formula is applied extensively throughout the Greek magical papyri. To give two examples: PGM IV. 130: 'Arouse the heart of NN whom NN has borne' (cf. IV. 94-153) and PGM IV. 2496: 'Make her, NN, whom NN bore, ill.'

seeking to gain control by employing a series of statements beginning with 'I know...'. For example, this 'I know' formula is used at great length throughout the 'binding spell of Astrapsoukos' (PGM VIII. 1-63):

"I also know what your forms are...I also know your wood: ebony.
I know you, Hermes...I also know your foreign names...These
are your foreign names" (PGM VIII. 8-21)³⁷

By grouping an 'I know' statement with a 'you are' formula in Mk. 1:24, the author of Mark is clearly conforming the demon's words to a pattern commonly found in ancient magic. The pronouncement 'you are (name)' is as common as the 'I know' formula in the Greek magical papyri and it functions as further proof of the magician's knowledge of the spirit that he is seeking to control. For example:

'You [are] the dew of all the gods, you [are] the heart of Hermes, you are the seed of the primordial gods, you are the eye of Helios, you are the light of Selene, you are the zeal of Osiris, you are the beauty and the glory of Ouranos, you are the soul of Osiris' daimon...you are the spirit of Ammon.' (PGM IV. 2984-86)

'I summon you... you who created light and darkness; you are Osoronnophris...you are Iabas; you are Iapos, you have distinguished the just and the unjust; you have made female and male; you have revealed seed and fruits, you have made men love each other and hate each other.' (PGM V. 103-5)

In the final stage of the demon's defence against Jesus' exorcism, the demon cries out that Jesus is ὁ ἄγιος τοῦ θεοῦ. Although this appears to be a form of messianic

³⁷ Although PGM VIII is dated to approximately the fourth or fifth century, the 'I know' formula appears in the magical writings of many ancient civilizations. For example, the Egyptian Papyrus of Ani, a papyrus of the Theban period which contains a number of pages of the Book of the Dead, includes the sentence 'I know thee, I know thy name, I know the names of the Forty-two Gods who live with thee in this Hall of Maati...' (Ch. 125).

confession, there appears to be no tradition surrounding the title and no evidence of its use during the period. In light of the indications of magical manipulative techniques in the demoniac's previous outbursts, it is likely that this address provides additional proof that the demon has correctly identified Jesus and therein contributes towards the demon's magical assault.

In summary, the demon's counter-attack in Mk. 1:24 is as follows; the demon identifies Jesus by his name and origin (Ἰησοῦ Ναζαρηνέ), his activity and purpose (ἤλθες ἀπόλεσαι ἡμᾶς;) and his status (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ). These statements confirm the demon's correct recognition of Jesus and they are therefore intended as a direct threat against him. Some commentators on this passage have recognised elements of magical activity in the words of the demoniac. For example, Rudolf Bultmann comments that in Mk. 1:24 'such an identification is a technical device for the purposes of magic.'³⁸ Graham Twelftree, however, observes that very few of the historical parallels to the words of the demoniac are actually spoken by demons since they are usually 'words addressed to a power-authority in order to gain its aid'.³⁹ I would suggest that although Twelftree's observation is applicable in the interchange between Jesus and the demoniac in Mk. 5:7 (see below), parallels to Mk. 1:24 are not found within the magical texts which seek to gain the voluntary aid of a higher authority, but from a body of magical texts in which the magician is concerned with gaining control and supremacy over a spirit, usually by employing a series of aggressive and coercive techniques. When applied in the context of

³⁸ Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 209.

³⁹ G. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Mass: Hendrickson) p. 68.

a power-struggle between two opposing forces, the individual who pronounces these statements is not seeking to gain the assistance of a higher force, but he is employing a common magical technique used by magicians to bind and control a spiritual being. However, although these techniques are typically employed by a magician attempting to control a spirit, these role are reversed in Mk. 1:24 and it is the demon that is attempting to control Jesus.⁴⁰

Adjuring angels: the Gerasene demoniac's attempt to manipulate Jesus (Mk. 5:1-20)

As previously encountered in the account of the Capernaum demoniac in Mk. 1:24, the initial words of the Gerasene demoniac in Mk. 5:7 constitute an aggressive attempt by the possessing demon to gain preternatural control over Jesus. It is not until the next verse (Mk. 5:8) that we discover that the demon's aggressive defence is not a spontaneous outburst, but that it is a response to Jesus' previous exorcistic command. The resulting notion of a power struggle raging between Jesus and the possessing demon is typical of the Markan emphasis upon the cosmic conflict between good and evil and his tendency to glorify Jesus as an all-powerful exorcist who conquers the powers of evil. However, since verse eight implies that Jesus' command was ineffective or that it had been ignored by the demon it is unlikely that this would have been consciously implied by the editor and therefore it is doubtful that this verse was a later edition to the story (particularly since, as previously established in Chapter II, the reapplication of a technique was a major

⁴⁰ Bultmann recognised the role reversal in this passage and states: 'the demon appears in the role of the threatened man, who utters his 'protective' words, while Jesus takes on the role of the demon!' (Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 280).

indication of magical practice and there are additional instances in the Gospels in which Jesus fails to achieve immediate success and he is required to reattempt a healing (cf. Mk. 8:22-26)). Nevertheless, the presence of this problematic verse in the narrative tells us that the author of Mark considered this verse to be valuable to his story and that it needed to be included even though it indicates that Jesus' initial command was ineffectual. By tucking it gently under the demoniac's outburst in verse 7, the author of Mark breaks the order of dialogue and softens the idea that Jesus' command did not work.

In the demoniac's question 'what have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?' (Mk. 5:7) we once again are presented with a formula of mutual identity (τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί;) and a revelation of Jesus' true identity as Son of the 'Most High God', a phrase which is also found in the magical papyri (for example, PGM V. 46 exhorts the spirit to leave and not to harm the magician 'in the name of the most high god'). However, rather than threatening Jesus by using an 'I know' formula, the demon openly attempts to adjure Jesus by crying out ὁρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν ('I adjure you by God'). This statement could be mistaken for a desperate plea of mercy from the demons who beg Jesus to 'swear by God' that he will not to harm them, but this is not the case. Roy Kotansky observes in his study of Greek exorcistic amulets that the verb ὁρκίζω dates back to at least the fifth-century BC and is used in the context of oaths sworn between contracting parties.⁴¹ On

⁴¹ R. Kotansky, 'Greek Exorcistic Amulets' in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.) *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) p. 250. In support of this, J. Schneider defines the term ὁρκίζω as 'to cause someone to swear' (J. Schneider, 'ὁρκος/ὁρκίζω', TDNT 5, p. 462) and Graham Twelftree writes that 'the general meaning of ὁρκίζω is clear, to adjure or implore someone, or more correctly to cause to swear by someone.' (G. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) p. 33).

the use of the term to adjure angels, Naomi Janowitz points out that adjurations ‘are a form of swearing or oath-taking’ and that techniques involving this form of spirit-control were ‘common practice in the first century’.⁴² Janowitz explains that in attempting an adjuration:

‘the officiant is trying to make the angel comply with a demand based on common social practices for bringing about compliance.’⁴³

As the term ὀρκίζω was considered to be effective in allowing the magician to control spirits and demons, it was used both in exorcisms and magical procedures involving spirit manipulation. For example, when discussing a magical incantation for banishing demons found on a lead tablet dated to the fourth or early third-century BC, Kotansky comments that ‘the text shows at an early stage two crucial procedures for the expelling of demons: the use of the ‘flee’-formula and the application of an oath (ὄρκος)’ and he concludes that ‘ὀρκῶμεν [*sic*] surely operates as a supernaturally binding formula.’⁴⁴ The widespread use of ὀρκίζω when binding demons in the ancient world is demonstrated by the practices of the Jewish exorcists in Acts 19:13 and the formation of the popular word ‘exorcism’, from the Greek ἐξορκίζω, which literally means ‘to cause to swear’ or ‘to put on oath’.⁴⁵

The addition of τὸν θεόν in Mk. 5:7 is entirely consistent with the common form of adjuration found within the Greek magical papyri, in which the first person singular form

⁴² N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 50.

⁴³ Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, p. 51.

⁴⁴ R. Kotansky, ‘Greek Exorcistic Amulets’, p. 254-255.

⁴⁵ William Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 277.

of ὀρκίζω is used alongside the name of a powerful deity in order to adjure or compel a spirit to obey the magician's requests. For example, in an exorcism entitled 'a tested charm of Pibechis' (PGM IV. 3007-86) the magician commands the demon 'I adjure you (ὀρκίζω σε) by the God of the Hebrews' (IV. 3019-20) and 'I adjure you (ὀρκίζω σε) by God the light bringer' (IV. 3046). Similarly, in PGM IV. 286-95 ('spell for picking a plant') the magician declares: 'I adjure you by the undefiled name of the god' (IV. 290). In addition to the demoniac's attempt to 'adjure' Jesus 'by God' in this passage, a similar technique is used by the high priest in Mt. 26:63. When attempting to adjure Jesus to reveal his true self, the high priest says 'I adjure you by the living God (ἐξορκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος), tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' As the words of the demoniac in Mk. 5:7 are similar to those used by the high priest in Mt. 26:63 and both serve the purpose of aggressively seeking to expose Jesus' true identity, I would suggest that connotations of magical coercion are present within both passages.

In light of the considerable evidence to support this interpretation of the term ὀρκίζω, I would suggest that the demon's words in Mk. 5:7 should be interpreted as having both a prophylactic and coercive function. The demon initially threatens Jesus by demonstrating his knowledge of Jesus' true identity and he then attempts to gain control over Jesus by shouting 'I adjure you by God'. The authors of Matthew and Luke are obviously uncomfortable with the concept that the demon is attempting to bind Jesus or they are aware that this statement carries significant magical connotations since the Matthean version omits the adjuration (Mt. 8:29) and the author of Luke softens it to a plea from the demon ('I beseech you (δέομαί σου), do not torment me', Lk. 8:28).

The statements made by the demoniacs in Mk. 1:24 and Mk. 5:7 demonstrate that the author of these accounts generally understood that the name of an individual and details regarding his origin and activities could be employed in a magical attack against him.⁴⁶ If these stories are a Markan invention then the evangelist may have been familiar with superstitions surrounding the magical use of the name, indeed it would be a rare individual in the ancient world who was not acquainted with his notion, and this may explain why Jesus is depicted as making continual attempts to conceal his identity and activities on other occasions in the Gospels. Alternatively, if these are historically reliable accounts of exorcisms performed by the Historical Jesus, then we must consider the possibility that Jesus himself was aware that his opponents were actively using his identity in malicious magical attacks against him and he therefore wisely concealed his identity from them.

The concealment of magical knowledge/technique from the public

Concealing the words of a rite or incantation from the public in general was essential in the ancient magical tradition for a variety of reasons. First, it was thought that disclosing details of the divine mysteries to the masses would offend the gods and there are many slander spells in the Greek magical papyri to punish those who make public revelations regarding their magical knowledge. For example, the performer of the 'spell of attraction' in PGM IV. 2441-2621 promises to inflict illness on his victim who 'has slanderously

⁴⁶ The possibility that the author of the story was fully aware of the techniques used in magical spirit manipulation is supported by Jesus' use of magical techniques as a defensive response in both of these passages (as we will see later in Chapter VI).

brought your holy mysteries to the knowledge of men' (IV. 2475-2477). A similar warning is heeded in a story concerning the Greek historian Theopompus (380 BC) who began to suffer headaches when translating the Jewish law into Greek. He prayed and asked why this was so and the gods sent him a dream in which he was told that he was suffering because he had revealed divine things to the public.⁴⁷

Second, since the magical rite may contain physical or verbal elements that clearly indicate that the performer is engaging in magical activity, the magician may fear that by practicing his magic openly in public he will evidently, at the very least, be subjected to ridicule and be required to justify his actions to observers or, at the worst, he will attract the attention of the authorities and suffer the legal penalties for practicing magic.⁴⁸ Pieter W. van der Horst states that the 'unacceptable or even criminal character of the petition' accounts for the secrecy in which magicians would practice their art and consequently spells were pronounced 'either silently or in a low voice or murmur'.⁴⁹ Since magicians and miracle-workers often used secrecy as a means of concealing their activities in order to avoid persecution, similar concerns may well strengthen the case for the Historical Jesus' own appeal to secrecy. If the authorities were growing suspicious of Jesus' behaviour then we would naturally expect Jesus to attempt to suppress reports of miraculous healings before they became widespread. A preliminary means of doing this

⁴⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII. 14.

⁴⁸ With regard to embarrassment and ridicule, Luhrmann states that creating an 'insider' and 'outsider' group 'shields [the magician's] magic from conflict with scepticism.' (T. M. Luhrmann, 'The Magic of Secrecy', p. 139).

⁴⁹ Van Der Horst, 'Silent Prayer in Antiquity' p. 6-7. Celsus was aware that Christians practiced their rituals in a similar way in order to avoid the death penalty (Origen, *Con. Cels.* I. 3.).

would be to silence his patients and the surrounding crowds, however this may have been difficult since Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus' fame spread very early into his ministry (Mk. 1:28) and that the healings attracted large crowds (Mk. 1:41-45, 3:9-10). The author of Mark tells us that questions were already in circulation regarding the source of Jesus' ability to perform miracles and this is reflected in the chief priest's question 'by what authority are you doing these things?' (Mk. 11:28//Lk. 20:2) to which the secrecy theme resurfaces in Jesus' response: 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things' (Mk. 11:33//Lk. 20:8). If the Historical Jesus did not want to draw attention to himself and his activities, then he may have been averse to large crowds when healing, often being eager to finish the healing or exorcism when they start to gather (as indicated in Mk. 9:25) and even removing the patient from public view (Mk. 7:33, 8:23, 5:40). Although Mark tells us that Jesus took great care to conceal his activities from the public, there are a number of difficulties which arise when explaining the presence of the secrecy theme within Mark's Gospel as a preventative measure against rumours concerning his divine nature reaching the authorities. First, Jesus does not consistently silence his patients after each healing. For example, Bartimaeus the beggar is not silenced (Mk. 10:46-52) and neither is there a direct injunction to silence in the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22-26).⁵⁰ Second, there are no direct revelations of Jesus' identity during the healings. Third, Jesus makes candid statements concerning his identity to the crowds (Mk. 2:10). Finally, Jesus heals directly in front of the authorities (Mk. 3:1-6) and even openly reveals his divine power source to them (Mk.3:28-29//Mt. 12:31-32//Lk. 11:20).

⁵⁰ Although in this latter case we may assume that the command not to enter the village is an indirect injunction to silence.



As many magicians and miracle-workers in the ancient world considered secrecy to be of paramount importance for their continued livelihood and survival, it is highly likely that the Historical Jesus held similar concerns and therefore I would suggest that the presence of secrecy commands in Mark's Gospel may reflect the words and behaviours of the Historical Jesus. We have considered the possibility that the Historical Jesus used secrecy when addressing his *disciples* as a means of attracting followers and creating insider/outsider groups and also the possibility that secrecy was used when confronted by *enemies* in order to protect his identity from the authorities and magical rivals. However, difficulties arise when considering the secrecy commands given to *the healed and the exorcised* in Mark's Gospel. If, as related in Mark's Gospel, Jesus did not consistently silence his patients, his messianic status was not revealed through his healing activities and he did not always attempt to conceal his activities from public speculation, then we must assume that the confidentiality demanded of those healed and exorcised by Jesus was not concerned with a revelation of his divine nature, nor intended to prevent reports of his activities reaching the authorities.

The sporadic nature of these secrecy commands suggests that Jesus demanded silence of certain patients on specific occasions. It certainly appears that the healing accounts in which the participants have been removed from public view and subsequently commanded to silence also involve unusual physical techniques which could be construed as having magical elements to them. For example, in Mk. 8:23 we have the

application of spittle, in Mk. 5:40 there is the phrase 'Talitha Koum' and Mk. 7:33-34 describes an unusual combination of techniques in which Jesus spits, touches his tongue, looks up to heaven, sighs and utters a healing word. In each of these accounts, the patient has been removed from the crowd and there is a swift command to silence once the healing has been completed.⁵¹ As the magician fears that the implicit magic in his techniques might lead to legal penalties, Jesus may have been aware that certain elements of his healing procedures could be interpreted by observers as magical techniques and thereby attract an ensuing punishment. Therefore the commands to silence may not have been to avoid a 'messianic' revelation, but to protect his physical techniques from incurring a charge of magic. This would account for why the secrecy theme is not strictly adhered to in every case and why the patient is occasionally removed from the crowd. Indeed, as Crossan suggests, the private nature of these healings does imply a degree of deviancy and secrecy associated with dangerous practices such as magical healing.⁵² Perhaps we must therefore interpret the commands given to Jesus' patients not as 'don't tell anyone who I am', but 'don't tell anyone what I did'.

In order to determine whether the use of magical techniques could account for Jesus' secretive behaviour, we must now turn to the healing accounts of the Gospels, particularly to the passages mentioned above (Mk. 5:40, 8:23 and 7:33-34), and consider whether the Gospel writers present evidence which suggests that magical techniques were employed by Jesus when healing the sick.

⁵¹ In the case of Mk. 5:40, the crowd has been removed prior to the healing, (5:40 'he put them all outside') and the command to silence follows in verse 43.

⁵² See John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (Harper: San Francisco, 1991) p. 325.

CHAPTER IV

THE HALLMARKS OF SORCERY: TECHNIQUES OF NATURAL MAGIC IN THE GOSPELS

‘And he next proceeds to bring a charge against the Saviour Himself, alleging that it was by means of sorcery that He was able to accomplish the wonders which He performed; and that foreseeing that others would attain the same knowledge, and do the same things, making a boast of doing them by help of the power of God, He excludes such from His kingdom.’

~ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.6 ~

By supposing that others could ‘attain the same knowledge and do the same things’ it is clear that Celsus understood that Jesus’ ability to perform miracles was dependent on his knowledge of correct procedures that were required to achieve such results and that this knowledge could be employed by the astute observer in order to recreate a miracle regardless of his standing with God. Many of the healing accounts in the Gospels certainly imply that knowledge of a particular procedure or method is essential to the success of the cure. For example, the author of Mark mentions a word of command and a sigh (Mk. 5:41; 7:34) and all three Synoptics include a physical technique such as touch or the application of materials to the body (Mt. 20:34; Mk. 7:33; Lk. 22:5; Jn. 9:6). A fine assortment of these unusual methods are found in the healing of the deaf mute in Mk. 7:31-37 in which we encounter a combination of spoken words (a sigh and the word ‘Ephphatha’), the application of material (spit) and touch (the placing of Jesus’ fingers in the man’s ears and touching his tongue). It is perfectly reasonable to conclude that if

these techniques were effective *in and of themselves*, then they could be adopted by the keen observer who, by following the correct procedure, could recreate the healing. That similar techniques were already in circulation when Jesus began his healing ministry is suggested by the numerous reports of healers and miracle-workers during and after Jesus' lifetime¹ and therefore the evangelists may have simply incorporated familiar, therapeutic *modus operandi* used by Jesus' contemporaries in an attempt to accommodate him to the image of a first-century healer.² However, if these techniques could easily be acquired and used effectively by the common man, then why would the Gospel writers, who were keen to present Jesus as an individual of a divine nature or a 'Son of God', incorporate material which suggests that Jesus used commonplace and inferior methods of healing? Furthermore, if it were the intention of the Gospel authors to present Jesus as an archetypal first-century healer, then we would expect to encounter Jesus using many other popular medical procedures elsewhere in the Gospels. But this is not the case. We do not find Jesus offering medical advice to his followers or patients and, as Howard Kee points out, 'there is in the gospels not a single instance of the technical language or

¹ For examples of exorcisms and healings by Jesus' contemporaries, see J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* Vol. II, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York; Doubleday, 1991) pp. 576-601.

² Howard Clark Kee raises this possibility in the introduction to his study of magic and medicine in the New Testament: 'Is Jesus adopting, or being conformed by the bearers of the tradition to patterns of miracle-working, or medicine, or magic that were alive in the world of the first century?' (Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (SNTSMS 55; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 2). In agreement with this suggestion, Hendrik van der Loos places Jesus alongside his medical contemporaries on the basis of his use of medical techniques (Hendrik van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. W. C. van Unnik et al., trans. T. S. Preston, *NovTSup* 9 (Leiden,: E. J. Brill, 1965).

methods of the medical tradition from the time of Hippocrates to Galen.’³ Although Jesus on occasion refers to himself as a ‘physician’ (Mk. 2:17//Mt. 9:12//Lk. 4:23; 5:31), these comments do not arise directly from his healing activities and they are merely the use of a common proverb.

There are additional flaws with the theory that these techniques are a deliberate addition by the Gospel authors. A close association between physical technique and magic in the ancient world ensured that many healers who used unorthodox methods risked attracting an allegation of magical practice. For instance, Origen’s summary of Celsus’ argument above (p. 98) demonstrates that the application of technique was used in polemical materials to imply magical activities in the operations of opponents. If Jesus’ enemies had observed him using specific techniques then they may well have seized upon this as a prime means through which to level a charge of magic against him. This possibility is supported by John Hull who states on the very first page of his introduction to *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* that it is highly probable that the Jewish authorities considered Jesus to be using questionable, forbidden or magical healing methods during his lifetime and from this they contrived to make their accusations of magic.⁴

³ Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times*, pp. 65-66. See also John Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (SBT, 2nd Series 28; London: SCM, 1974) p. 74-75. S. Eitrem points out: ‘neither do we find Jesus using other popular medical methods such as blowing a sickness away from the patient’ (S. Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, 2nd, rev. and enl. ed., Symbolae Osloenses. Fasc. Supplet. 20 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1966) p. 47, see also pp. 59-60).

⁴ ‘The Jewish objection to the healings on the sabbath was....not the sabbath activity itself but the magical techniques used by Jesus’ (John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 1).

If allegations of magic were made against Jesus during or after his lifetime, then it is unlikely that the Gospel authors would consciously incorporate dubious healing techniques into their narratives, especially since many early readers would have been familiar with magical practices and perfectly capable of applying a magical interpretation to the text.⁵ That the Gospel authors were aware of the volatile nature of their material is indicated by their noticeable effort to remove reference to physical techniques from the healing accounts wherever they detect that certain words, actions or materials present in the healing accounts do not fit the framework of a first-century healer, but instead come dangerously close to describing the activities of a first-century magician.

An authorial 'hot potato': narrative editing and the addition of apologetic material

It is human nature to present the history of individuals for whom we have a fondness or groups that we have sought allegiance alongside through rose-tinted spectacles. In our contemporary culture, magazine articles charting the success of pop singers or football clubs typically emphasise the awards and accolades and play down the occasional drug-abuse or sex scandal according to the source of funding for the article or the musical taste or sporting allegiance of the author. As consumers we are naturally suspicious of the underlying intention of the author and the motives behind their selective use of material. Since the majority of received texts and belief systems that inform the overriding perception that we have today of the life and death of the Jesus of the Gospels were

⁵ Paul Achtemeier states that Luke was writing for an audience 'who understood, and perhaps even credited, magical practices' (Paul J. Achtemeier, 'The Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch', *JBL* 94 (1975) p. 558).

constructed by the Christian post-Easter community who were sympathetic to his message and eager to present him in a positive light, I would suggest that the Gospels should be approached with the same degree of caution. In a bid to endorse their hero, the evangelists would naturally seek to incorporate suitable, promotional material and reject reports which included contradictory, or damaging, information. Therefore it is necessary, if not essential, when examining the healing techniques found in the Gospels to keep in mind the intentions of the editors and adopt a degree of suspicion regarding the inclusion or exclusion of certain aspects of the miracle accounts.

Although the miracle stories were essential tools in the promotion of the Christian message, the legal penalties and social fears that were associated with the practice of magic ensured that it was imperative that any suspicious material that could be seized upon by opponents was eliminated or adequately explained by the Gospel authors. As a result, the miracle accounts have been subjected to an intense editorial process which has strained out a great deal of evidence of magical practice. Morton Smith observes that 'we have to deal with a body of edited material' and the magical elements that remain 'are probably only the tips of the iceberg of suppressed traditions.'⁶ Possible reasons for why specific passages have been edited or omitted will become evident when examining certain healing accounts on an individual basis, but a general overview of this editorial whitewashing shows the magnitude of this activity.

⁶ M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978) p. 93.

That the authors of Matthew and Luke may be hostile to the practice of magic could possibly account for why techniques with potentially magical elements are eliminated within these two Gospels. The author of Luke's Gospel repeatedly removes any healings which involve unusual procedures, such as the healing of the deaf-mute (Mk. 7:31-37), the blind man of Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22-26) and the healing word given to Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5:41). The author of Matthew also omits any Markan healings which suggest the presence of a technique (again namely the healing of the deaf-mute in Mk. 7:31-37 and the blind man of Bethsaida in Mk. 8:22-26).⁷ Furthermore, in the Matthean account of the Gerasene demoniac (Mt. 8:28-34), all magical traits have been removed to the extent that the demon and Jesus have very little interaction; there is no indication that the demons have ignored Jesus' first command for them to leave, Jesus' request for the name of the demon is missing (and consequently the name 'Legion') and Jesus' exorcising words are simply reduced to the command ὑπάγετε ('go', Mt. 8:32).

This process of careful editing often proves to be an immensely frustrating impediment for the New Testament scholar when scrutinising the Gospels for traces of magical practices. However, instances in which the Gospel writers appear to have faltered over the inclusion of a certain technique or a word and scrambled to omit, explain or change their received texts are a good indication that they were aware that the material was unsuitable or that it had the potential to be used polemically against Christians. Whenever it is possible to detect the delicate treatment of a received text by the editors, our

⁷ John Hull observes: 'the Matthean material to some extent, but not systematically, is purged of details which might give rise to a magical interpretation' (John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 116).

suspensions are aroused as to whether the difficulty in the passage was one of implied magical activity. If so, the exclusion of this material provides a good indication of what behaviours or methods constituted 'magic' to a first-century audience, as the historian H. S. Versnel states:

'if Jesus or his biographers systematically avoided references to manipulations which might arouse suspicion of magic, they must have known *what* to avoid.'⁸

However, it is not only the *absence* of material that provides a valuable indicator that the Gospel redactors suspected dubious practices within their received traditions, but also the deliberate *inclusion* of material. The addition of anti-magical passages with seemingly apologetic purposes, especially in close proximity to the miracles or the supernatural abilities of Jesus, suggests that the Gospel authors were aware that charges of magic were being brought against Jesus and that these are attempts to directly eradicate such notions.⁹ Morton Smith recognises the purpose of these additions and suggests that anti-magical passages in the Gospels must be approached with suspicion as they are 'probably exaggerated, if not wholly invented, for apologetic purposes.'¹⁰ I would suggest that the most obvious magic apologetic within the Gospels is found very early in Jesus' career in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and it appears in the form of a mystical encounter between Jesus and the Devil.

⁸ H. S. Versnel, 'Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion', *Numen* 38, (1991), pp. 190-191.

⁹ As Smith comments: 'apologetic traits indicate the existence of charges about Jesus that the gospels were trying to answer' (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 141).

¹⁰ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 93.

The temptation narrative as magic apologetic (Mt. 4:1-11//Lk. 4:1-13)

All three Synoptic accounts of the temptation narrative portray Jesus as enduring forty days in the wilderness, a period which alludes to the forty years spent by Israel in the wilderness (Exod. 16:35, Num. 14:33-34) and resembles the episodes of solitude, purification and spiritual encounter that are often associated with the early lives of holy men such as Moses, Zoroaster and Pythagoras (Mk. 1:13//Mt. 4:2//Lk. 4:2, cf. pg. 185 below).¹¹ The short Markan temptation narrative appears to depict a typical shamanic experience¹², however the purpose of the expanded temptation narrative in Mt. 4:1-11 and Lk. 4:1-13 is not immediately clear to the reader. Why would an author who claims to present a solemn historical account of an individual's life begin with a story which involves the main character conversing with a mythical, demonic being? The mythological language within the passage makes a literal, historical reading of the account difficult for the modern scholar. Bultmann, for one, dismisses it as a legend.¹³ Although the bizarre imagery may deter an authentic interpretation in our modern clime, it has been suggested that the implausibility of this account was not so for the early

¹¹ As Luigi Schiavo proposes: '[the temptation narrative] could be placed within the literary genre 'vocation of the divine man' or 'temptation of the wise', a tradition that was known in the first century CE...and applied to characters such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Solomon, Ezra, Job, Elijah, Moses, Hananiah den Dosa, Honi the Circle-drawer and others...This is in fact common in the process of initiation of a shaman' (Luigi Schiavo, 'The Temptation of Jesus: The Eschatological Battle and the New Ethic of the First Followers of Jesus in Q', *JSNT* 25.2 (2002) p. 144).

¹² We will come to address the similarities between the temptation narrative and the early stages of shamanic initiation in Chapter V.

¹³ R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) p. 253.

reader, as Godet points out:

‘the ancients generally understood this account *literally*. They believed that the devil appeared to Jesus in a bodily form, and actually carried him away to the mountain and to the pinnacle of the temple.’¹⁴

Attempts within New Testament scholarship to explain the temptation as a historical event tend to acknowledge an element of authenticity within the account and yet inevitably add a pinch of post-Enlightenment sobriety. Some theories propose that the report is of an *apparent reality* within the psyche of Jesus, taking either the form of a psychological and/or moral struggle confined to the reality constructed in his mind or an ecstatic or visionary experience such as those endured by shamans.¹⁵ Understanding this encounter with the Devil in terms of contemporary developments within the field of psychology and psychiatrics, which have seen the Devil increasingly situated within the human psyche¹⁶, we could perhaps interpret the account as depicting Jesus encountering and battling against his own inner demons.¹⁷ However, it is highly unlikely that the

¹⁴ F. L. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1881) p. 221.

¹⁵ For example, Luigi Schiavo proposes that the temptation is a ‘transcendental experience of religious ecstasy’ (Luigi Schiavo, ‘The Temptation of Jesus’, p. 145).

¹⁶ Brian Horne in his study *Imagining Evil* states: ‘Evil...may well be embodied in the figure of Satan, but it has ceased to exist as a supernatural possibility; it has to be located within the individual human mind’ (Brian Horne, *Imagining Evil* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996) p. 75). Contributions to this perception of evil in the field of psychology have included the works of Jung (who explored the ‘shadow side’ of human nature) and Freud (who saw the Devil as a personification of repressed, unconscious drives).

¹⁷ William Barclay suggests that the temptation narrative is ‘very clearly an attempt to externalize an inner experience of Jesus’ (William Barclay, *The First Three Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1966) p. 102). Similarly, Kimball refers to it as ‘a visionary or inward, spiritual experience’ (Charles A. Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke’s Gospel* (JSNTSup 94. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) p. 84).

Gospel writers intended to give a psychological critique of Jesus' mental state since, as C.

K. Barrett comments:

‘[the evangelists] were not novelists of the psychological school, and they very rarely or never pause to depict the inner mind of Jesus and to discuss his feelings.’¹⁸

Alternatively, Barrett suggests that the temptation has been included by the evangelists as a type of ‘example story’ to teach the reader that they should not be tempted in a similar fashion.¹⁹ Whether this is a pedagogical device that was employed by Jesus himself or a teaching that was incorporated into the text at a later date to educate the Christian community is not clear. Either way, it seems unlikely that the Gospel authors would retain the story, or equally invent such a superfluous addition, as in doing so they draw attention to Jesus’ human frailties and susceptibility to temptation.²⁰

I would suggest that the extended version of the temptation story in both Matthew and Luke does not find its source in the words of the Historical Jesus, but that it is a literary device created by the later Christian community in order to weave a particular apologetic stratagem into the Jesus tradition; more specifically, a defence against charges of magic in Jesus’ ministry. In Mt. 4:3-11/Lk. 4:3-13, Jesus is tempted to perform acts that would

¹⁸ C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1977) p. 48.

¹⁹ Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, p. 47. As an addition by the Christian community to reduce the importance of miracle-working and promote morality, see R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 255.

²⁰ Alfred Plummer comments: ‘His disciples would not have been likely to think that He could be tempted to evil’ (Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary in the Gospel of Matthew* (London: Paternoster, 1909) p. 36).

be expected of a magician.²¹ The first temptation takes the form of an enticement to use his powers for his own needs and self-gratification ('command this stone to become bread', Mt. 4:3//Lk. 4:3). The second temptation is to perform a frivolous trial of power based on the arrogant presumption that spiritual powers will immediately be present to save him ('throw yourself down', Mt. 4:6//Lk. 4:9).²² Finally, the Devil tempts Jesus with dominion over 'the kingdoms of the world' (Mt. 4:8//Lk. 4:5) and encourages him to use his new-found abilities to further his own authority and self-importance, all of which would involve submitting to the control of the Devil. The deliberate insertion of a passage early into the Gospel narratives in which Jesus rejects the pompous and greedy behaviour associated with magicians indicates that the authors of Matthew and Luke intend the story to act as a mental 'road-block' to the reader in order to discredit the figure of 'Jesus the magician' right from the outset.²³ Furthermore by having the figure of *Satan* echo the readers' suspicions that Jesus might be a magician, this suggests that this manner of thinking is not only foolish but also heretical and evil. To think that Jesus is a magician is tantamount to thinking like Satan.²⁴

²¹ Morton Smith states that 'flying through the air and turning stones into bread were typical feats of magicians' (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 105).

²² Compare this with PGM I. 92: 'Test this oath of the god on [what] you wish.'

²³ For the temptation as a distraction from the figure of Jesus the magician, see P. Samain, 'L'Accusation de Magie contre le Christ dans les Evangiles.' *EphTL* 15 (1938) p. 489, also R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 255 and David Aune 'Magic in Early Christianity' in *ANRW* ed. Wolfgang Haase, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980) pp. 1540-41.

²⁴ The evangelists may also be using this account as an attack on Jewish messianic expectations, which were considered to be evil and immoral (See M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* trans. Betram Lee Woolf, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1971, pp. 247-48).

If the authors of Matthew and Luke include the temptation narrative as a means by which to address a charge of magic, then they must have been aware of rumours in circulation during the creation of their Gospels that were sufficiently notorious to warrant the construction of an entire mythological narrative in order to engage with these issues.²⁵ However, although the temptation story is effective in detracting from the figure of 'Jesus the magician', the dialogue between Jesus and the Devil does not disallow the possibility that he was entirely capable of achieving these magical feats. The authors of Matthew and Luke could not present Jesus as being *unable* to perform the acts requested by the Devil as this would have damaged the messianic nature of Jesus by implying limitations on his power. Therefore the reasons given for Jesus' refusal to obey the Devil are based on morality and not incapability in both accounts.²⁶ There are further occasions in the Gospels in which Jesus rejects the personal admiration or financial gain which arises as a consequence of his ability to perform miracles. For example, in Lk. 10:20 Jesus warns the seventy-two who have returned boasting of their exorcistic abilities: 'do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' Similarly, in Mt. 10:8 Jesus instructs the twelve that they should heal the sick and exorcise demons and yet they should 'give without pay' (δωρεάν δότε). Since many magicians in antiquity would sell their services for a profit, the command to 'give without pay' suggests that they were expected to reject the standard payment that was required by

²⁵ This is, of course, assuming that the story was conceived by either Matthew or Luke and that they are not drawing upon Q material. However, if they are reliant on a Q source, then attempts to address rumours of magical practice may have been made even earlier into the tradition (as Smith notes: 'The picture must therefore have been earlier than the source of Q' (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 106)).

²⁶ In a similar fashion, Jesus refuses to perform a miracle for the Pharisees in Mk. 8:11-12//Mt. 16: 1-4 due to the manner in which they test him.

the magician (although, this in turn suggests that those offering payment considered their techniques to be similar to methods used by the magicians).²⁷ Whether the moral principles underlined in the temptation narrative, particularly those regarding the frivolous use of power and the testing of God, remain constant throughout the Gospels will be considered when we come to examine passages in which Jesus appears to behave, or instructs others to behave, to the contrary (see Chapter VIII).



If the Gospel authors were aware that charges of magic were being brought against Jesus and they were actively seeking to oppose these charges by incorporating anti-magical apologetic, then the presence of verbal and physical techniques within the Gospels that are clearly associated with magical activity is highly confusing.²⁸ Material bearing connotations of magical practice could possibly remain within the Gospels for three reasons; either the technique was not viewed as strictly magical in its original context, or it was overlooked during the editorial process, or the material was too well known to be discarded by the Gospel authors. It is unlikely that the evangelists would not have considered certain unusual healing techniques to have connotations of magic since these particular methods are clearly paralleled in the magical papyri and magical materials

²⁷ Apuleius makes a distinction between philosophers and magicians on this basis, stating that the magicians and the doctors only heal for monetary gain (Apuleius, *Apology*, 40.3). In addition, Apollonius claims that he is a true philosopher and therefore he does not have any interest in monetary gain (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 8.7).

²⁸ As Smith observes: 'Censorship left most references to magical procedures in the gospels scattered and isolated, one term here, another there.' (Smith, *Jesus the Magician* p. 145).

from the ancient world.²⁹ Equally, if charges of magic were in circulation during and after Jesus' lifetime, then the evangelists would surely have ensured that they had taken adequate care to exclude any evidence which could fuel polemics. The third and most persuasive explanation is that either Jesus' contemporaries were aware that he was using particular techniques or reports of these techniques were in circulation immediately following his death, therefore the redactors felt compelled to include these methods even though they carried serious implications of magical practice. If an obligation to the reader's familiarity with these rumours is the reason that this suspicious material remains in the Gospels and if these rumours were based on genuine observations of how the Historical Jesus healed the sick, then these instances may provide the reader with rare glimpses of the Historical Jesus using magical methods of healing.

Healing Technique 1: Words of command and sighs

The Gospel writer, the early Christian apologist and the modern day New Testament scholar have each attempted to distance Jesus from the activities of the magician by focusing on the single effectual 'word' through which Jesus is able to perform his miracles. For example, in his treatise *Against Marcion* (207 AD) Tertullian asserts that Jesus healed 'by the act of his word alone'³⁰, likewise the Christian apologist Lactantius states in his *Divine Institutes* (303-311 AD) that Jesus was able to heal the sick 'by a

²⁹ Harold Remus notes that 'the manipulations and *materia*' used by Jesus in the Gospels 'can be paralleled from the magical papyri and from texts describing magicians' (H. Remus, 'Magic or Miracle? Some Second Century Instances', *The Second Century* 2 (1982) p. 138).

³⁰ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, IV. 9.

single word'³¹ and in the eleventh-century Slavonic additions to Josephus' *Jewish War* we read: 'and all, whatsoever he wrought through an invisible power, he wrought by a word and command' (2:9). Even the apocryphal material places great emphasis on this powerful word; for example, in *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (140-170 AD) we read that the young Jesus 'made pools of the rushing water and made it immediately pure; he ordered this by word alone' (2:1).

Theories which emphasise the importance of Jesus' verbal commands in order to distance him from magical behaviour have as their fundamental basis the misguided notion that magical connotations are only present in *physical* technique and not in *spoken* technique. Grundmann, for instance, uses this distinction to disassociate Jesus' miracles from those of the magicians of the period:

'The miracles are evoked by the powerful Word of Jesus which has nothing to do with magic.'³²

In the same way, methods of exorcism employed by Jesus within the Gospels are often divorced from magic on the basis that these techniques use words alone. For example, Vincent Taylor comments regarding the Capernaum demoniac in Mark's Gospel:

'Jesus shares the ideas of his time, but so far transcends them that by a commanding word alone, without the use of magical practices, he casts out the unclean spirit.'³³

³¹ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 4. 15. 1.

³² Walter Grundmann, 'δύναμαι/δύναμις', *TDNT*, vol. 2, p. 302.

³³ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952) p. 171.

Individuals who separate Jesus' miracles from magic on the basis that the words of Jesus are dissimilar to the typical methods employed by the ancient magician are clearly ignoring a substantial amount of socio-historical and anthropological data. Words were considered in antiquity to be charged with a potency that was equally as powerful as, if not superior to, the physical techniques of magical ritual. A belief in the power of words to produce physical effects is demonstrated in both the Old and the New Testaments. For example, the book of Genesis begins with God creating the world through a series of pronouncements and the first verse of the Gospel of John asserts that in the beginning was ὁ λόγος ('the word'). S. J. Tambiah notes that many ancient religious communities regarded the words of their scriptures to be imbued with a significant measure of power and sacred texts were often recited in the original language.³⁴ The importance of preserving the sanctity of the original language is still advocated in contemporary religious rituals which frequently employ terms that are unfamiliar to ordinary language and deliberately isolated in such a way as to keep them sacred.³⁵ When investigating this widespread belief in the power of words, Tambiah concludes:

'no book on religion or the origins of language fails to refer to this ancient belief in the creative power of the word.'³⁶

The words that were spoken in ancient rituals were often perceived as magical techniques in themselves and they were considered to be equally as important as the physical actions

³⁴ 'In Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism the view has been strictly held that in religious ceremonies the sacred words recited should be in the language of the authorised sacred texts...The Catholic Church maintained the same view in respect of Latin liturgy until last year' (S. J. Tambiah, 'The Magical Power of Words' *Man* 3. 2 (1968), p. 181).

³⁵ Tambiah, 'The Magical Power of Words', pp. 179-182.

³⁶ Tambiah, 'The Magical Power of Words', p. 182.

used in the rite. For example, Malinowski observed in his study of Trobriand magical ritual that speech was equivalent to action³⁷ and similarly the anthropologist Edmund Leach comments:

‘Ritual as one observes it in primitive communities is a complex of words and actions... it is not the case that words are one thing and the rite another. The uttering of the words itself is a ritual.’³⁸

The ancient Egyptians held a fervent belief in the power of words and it is in accordance with this tradition that Moses is instructed in the operations of the Egyptians and as a result is ‘mighty in his words and deeds’ (Acts 7:22). The superior nature of magic performed by words alone in the Greek Magical papyri is indicated in PGM XXXVI. 161-77 in which the operator is told ‘no charm is greater, and it is to be performed by means of words alone’. Similarly, the instructions in PGM IV. 2081-84 state that ‘most of the magicians, who carried their instruments with them, even put them aside’. Hans Dieter Betz comments that this latter statement is an instance ‘where an inferior magic, using tools, is distinguished from a superior magic, employing magical words alone.’³⁹

As indicated by Tertullian, the suggestion that Jesus was able to perform miracles using words alone appears to have been the basis for the Jewish allegations that he was a

³⁷ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their magic*, Vol. 2. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1965) p. 9. cf. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London, 1922) p. 404.

³⁸ Edmund Leach, ‘Ritualization in Man in Relation to Conceptual and Social Development’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, (1966) p. 407.

³⁹ Hans Dieter Betz, ‘Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri’ in Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (eds.) *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p. 248.

magician.⁴⁰ Although a correlation between Jesus' spoken commands and the practice of magic is clearly made in the polemical materials, there are certainly many passages in the Gospels in which the crowd or those approaching Jesus to be healed refer to a mysterious 'word'. Consequently we might ask whether these recurrent observations refer to a specific, possibly magical, word that was used by Jesus. For example, when Jesus has exorcised the Capernaum demoniac, the crowd ask each other 'what is this word?' (τίς ὁ λόγος, Lk. 4:36). Does the author of Luke intend the crowd's use of λόγος to be understood in the sense of 'authority' in this instance? Or are the crowds unfamiliar with a particular word that was used during the exorcism? Likewise, the centurion tells Jesus in Mt. 8:8/Lk. 7:7 that it is not necessary for him to attend the bedside of his servant as others will carry out the healing if Jesus would 'only say the word' (μόνον εἰπὲ λόγῳ).⁴¹ Once again, is the reader to understand that the centurion is aware of a specific word that could be spoken by Jesus in order to bring about the cure? Or is the request to 'say the word' a prompt for Jesus to grant his permission, i.e. 'give your blessing'?

Some commentators have proposed that Jesus' spoken words occasionally appear to have an incantational quality which suggests that they had a magical function.⁴² For example, Jesus' words seem to have a technical application in the exorcism of the dumb spirit in Mk. 9:29 in which Jesus teaches the disciples: 'this kind [of demon] cannot be driven out

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.17.

⁴¹ Graham Twelftree observes that Matthew adds the word 'only' (μόνος) to accentuate the centurion's confidence in Jesus' authority (Graham H Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999) p. 109).

⁴² For example, David Aune states: 'the great gulf which some New Testament scholars would place between 'the powerful word of the son' and 'magical incantations' is simply non-existent' (David Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity', *ANRW* (1980) p. 1532).

by anything but prayer.’ By referring to this ‘kind’ of demon (τοῦτο τὸ γένος) the reader may assume that Jesus’ is drawing attention to a specific category of demon, perhaps one that is responsible for producing this type of illness.⁴³ The disciples fail to realise that prayer is the only method by which the demon can be expelled and therefore they are unable to perform the exorcism, however it is not clear whether this denotes general or a specific prayer. Since the demon is promptly exorcised by Jesus, the reader assumes that Jesus must have correctly used this prayer and yet no words of a prayer are recorded in the text. If this story is a Markan construction, then why would the author of Mark give reference to a prayer and yet fail to give the words that were supposedly spoken? Perhaps the reader is to understand that Jesus’ words to the demon in verse 25 constituted a prayer, however this is unlikely as the command is a stern rebuke rather than a request for expulsion. Or are the believing words of the child’s father in verse 24 to be understood as the prayer? Alternately, if the story and the subsequent teaching regarding the importance of prayer derive from an authentic account of an exorcism performed by Jesus, then we must ask whether the words of the prayer have been edited out by the author of Mark. If so, why was he reluctant to include them? And, more importantly, did they carry any implications of magical incantation?

Passages in which the Gospel authors have provided the healing words of Jesus are usually points of contention within New Testament scholarship since these words often have a ‘strange’ quality that raises theological eyebrows. For instance, the healing words

⁴³ John Christopher Thomas supports this interpretation and points out that this is the only instance in Mark’s Gospel in which an illness is attributed to demon possession (John Christopher Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought*, JPT 13 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) p. 157).

given by Jesus generally comprise of imperative commands, a 'strange' word preserved in Aramaic or even a groaning noise. All of these are techniques that are repeatedly found within the ancient magical tradition and consequently their presence in the Gospels suggests that Jesus' healing words may have had an incantational nature.

Imperative commands

It is most often the case that an authoritative command spoken by Jesus within the Gospels is sufficient to bring about a cure or accomplish an exorcism. As David Aune observes:

'Jesus' own use of the authoritative word of command was perhaps the most characteristic technique which he used to effect both exorcisms and healings.'⁴⁴

While the imperative commands given by Jesus in the exorcism stories are addressed to the possessing entity (cf. Mk. 1:25 'be silent and come out of him!'), the commands given by Jesus in the healing accounts are generally addressed directly to the patient. For example, Jesus simply orders the paralytic to 'rise, take up your bed and go home' (Mk. 2:1-12//Mt. 9:1-8//Lk. 5:17-25) and the leper is told to 'be clean' (Mk. 1:40-45//Mt. 8:2-4//Lk. 5:12-16). Some scholars have proposed that these and other illnesses that are cured by Jesus in the Gospels are largely hysterical disorders. For example, Dunn suggests:

'there is no instance of a healing miracle which falls clearly outside the general category of psycho-somatic illnesses.'⁴⁵

⁴⁴ David E. Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity', *ANRW* (1980) p. 1529.

⁴⁵ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1975) p. 71. In support of this, Morton Smith suggests that the resurrections from death may have resulted from 'hysterical coma' (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 118).

If the cause of an individual's illness was purely psychosomatic, then Jesus' sharp command directed to the patient could instigate or reverse a psychological process, which in turn brings about the cure. While the cessation of a hysterical disorder may account for a large proportion of the healing miracles, there is a difficulty when applying this theory to the healing of the deaf-mute in Mk. 7:32-37. E. R. Micklem suggests that the deaf-mute suffers from a stammer, which he classifies as a hysterical symptom⁴⁶, however the command $\epsilon\phi\phi\alpha\theta\alpha$ that is given by Jesus cannot be intended to produce a psychological reaction since the patient is deaf.⁴⁷ Therefore we may conclude that the word $\epsilon\phi\phi\alpha\theta\alpha$ had a function that was not dependant upon the word being audibly perceived by the patient. Furthermore, since this is one of the few occasions in which a word is transliterated into Greek (in this instance from the Aramaic פתח , ethpaal imperative of the verb פתח , 'to open'), the patient may have been unfamiliar with the meaning of the word even if he had been of good hearing.

Foreign words

The word $\epsilon\phi\phi\alpha\theta\alpha$ in Mk. 7:32-37 is not the only occurrence of a strange or foreign word creeping into a healing account. In Mk. 5:38-41 Jesus gives the Aramaic command *talitha koum*, which the author of Mark translates for the reader as 'little girl, I say to you

⁴⁶ E. R. Micklem, *Miracles and the New Psychology: A Study in the Healing Miracles of the New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1922) pp. 114-120.

⁴⁷ John Hull concurs that 'since the man is deaf, the command can hardly be a communication' (Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 74). However Hull also cites Vincent Taylor who suggests that 'either he was not completely deaf or he was able to read the lips of Jesus' (Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952) p. 355).

arise' (Mk. 5:41). This phrase is constructed from the Aramaic feminine form of *flê*, meaning 'young' and *koum* or *koumi*, the Aramaic piel imperative singular of root ܡܩܡ, 'arise' or 'get up'. Although the word is translated in Mark's Gospel, the preservation of the Aramaic word jolts the reader and a sense of awkwardness regarding its inclusion is evident in the treatment of the passage by the other Synoptic authors. For example, the author of Luke provides the Greek 'child, arise' (ἡ παῖς, ἔγειρε, Lk. 8:54) and the Matthean version omits the healing word altogether (Mt. 9:18-26). Either Matthew and Luke simply considered the word *talitha* to be an uninteresting and superfluous element of the story that could be easily omitted, or they found the term offensive or embarrassing and consciously avoided its inclusion in their versions of the story. The author of Mark clearly has no difficulty with the inclusion of this Semitic word, but its purpose within the narrative remains a puzzle. Graham Twelftree proposes that the presence of other Aramaic words, such as *abba*, indicates that they were retained for dramatic effect.⁴⁸ Alternatively, some scholars suggest that the two Aramaic words found in Mark's Gospel are to be understood as magical words and there appears to be a great deal of evidence to support this theory.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999) p. 323. Alternatively, for Jesus' own use of 'abba' as an everyday word, see Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden, SBT 6 (London: SCM, 1967).

⁴⁹ Cf. G. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, trans. F. McDonagh, ed. J. Riches (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983) pp. 63-65. Also Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) p. 223 and D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (The Pelican Gospel Commentaries, 1963) p. 162.

E. P Sanders suggests that the ‘giving of the efficacious word in a foreign language’ is a ‘typical Hellenistic practice’.⁵⁰ What Sanders fails to add is that the use of a foreign word is a typically *magical* Hellenistic practice. Although some commentators would argue that the absence of physical technique and elaborate incantation in Mk. 5:41 and 7:34 suggests that magical procedures cannot be present⁵¹, the ancient magician would counter this by pointing out that words alone can contain a considerable degree of mystical energy. The shape, sound and breathing of a word was considered in the ancient magical tradition to be equally as important as the meaning of the word, often to the extent that the success of an incantation was dependent upon the correct pronunciation of the words or sounds within the magical text. Therefore it was essential that the words within a magical manuscript were preserved in the original language in which they were written and translating the words into other languages was resisted as it was thought to water down their effectiveness or cause them to lose their efficacy altogether. Iamblichus warns that it is dangerous to translate powerful words or names since ‘the translated names do not keep the same sense’ and ‘some linguistic characteristics of each people cannot be expressed in the language of another people.’⁵² He elaborates on this theory when discussing the problem of translating the Hermetic corpus, a set of writings deriving from the second to fifth centuries and written within a Greco-Roman context, stating: ‘for the very quality of the sounds and the [intonation] of the Egyptian words contain in itself the

⁵⁰ E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1996) p. 171.

⁵¹ For example, Howard Kee argues that Mark’s use of ‘Ephphatha’ in 7:34 ‘stands in the sharpest possible contrast with the extended invocations and formulas of the magical texts’ (H. C. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times*, p. 136).

⁵² Iamblichus, *De Myst.* VII. 257, 10-15.

force of things said.’⁵³ Similarly, the theologian Origen writes in his *Contra Celsum* regarding the dangers of translation:

‘Thus it is not the significance of the things which the words describe that had a certain power to do this or that, but it is the qualities and characteristics of the sound.’⁵⁴

Attempts to conserve the original language of certain divine names, angel names, religious terminology and liturgical formulas in the Greek magical papyri have led to the occasional preservation of the Coptic language within the predominantly Greek texts. With these concerns in mind, John Hull follows a discussion of the word *εφφαθα* with mention of the preservation of similar words in the magical papyri. Hull cites the Coptic words *ⲁⲩⲱⲛ ⲛⲏⲓ ⲁⲩⲱⲛ ⲛⲏⲓ* (‘open up for me, open up for me’) that appear immediately before *ⲁⲛⲟⲓⲛⲉⲩⲱⲧⲓ, ⲁⲛⲟⲓⲛⲉⲩⲱⲧⲓ* (‘be opened be opened’) in PGM XXXVI. 315 as an example of a powerful magical word that is retained in its original language.⁵⁵ Hull does not directly relate the ‘opening’ terminology in this spell to Mark. 7.34, perhaps because the spell is entitled ‘charm to open a door’ and therefore the terminology is fairly self-explanatory. I would suggest, however, that a clearer parallel to the Markan use of *εφφαθα* can be found in a ‘spell to heal an eye disease’ (PDM XIV. 1097-1103) in which the patient is required to anoint his eyes with ointment and repeat: ‘open to me, open to me, O great gods! Let my eyes open to the light’ (PDM XIV. 1124-5, cf. 1120, 1126, 1128).

⁵³ See Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 30.

⁵⁴ Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.25.

⁵⁵ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 85.

A major difficulty when retaining the original language of a powerful word, or even inventing words in the case of cryptography, is that the correct interpretation of the word is lost over time and we are left with gobbledegook. A prime example of this is the magical word 'Abracadabra' that is still in popular usage today, although we generally do not fully understand its meaning.⁵⁶ The lengthy unintelligible words or long chains of vowel sounds that are found within the magical papyri, commonly known as the *voces magicae* (literally, 'magic words'), appear to be the product of this isolated use of language. The meanings of the *voces magicae* are unclear, but they are generally considered to be words of great power and the success of a spell is often dependent upon their correct pronunciation.⁵⁷ This popular conception of an unintelligible word of magical power can trace its origins back to Egyptian magic⁵⁸, although Gideon Bohak observes that they 'figure prominently in Egyptian, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Latin, and Arabic magical texts of late antiquity.'⁵⁹

If the healing words in Mk. 5:41 and 7:34 were spoken by Jesus in a language that differed from the language used throughout the remainder of the healing, then we could

⁵⁶ Budge addresses this well-known magical word at length and suggests that the most likely explanation is that proposed by Bischoff: 'He derives the formula from the Chaldee words אברא כדברא i.e. ABBÂDÂ KÊ DÂBRÂ, which seem to be addressed to the fever and to mean something like "perish like the word"' (E. A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New York: University Books, 1968) pp. 220-1).

⁵⁷ H. S. Versnel writes that the *voces magicae* do not carry 'a comprehensible, lexical meaning' (H. S. Versnel, 'The Poetics of the Magical Charm: An essay in the power of words' in Mirecki, Paul (ed.) *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) p 108).

⁵⁸ See Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 28.

⁵⁹ Gideon Bohak, 'Hebrew, Hebrew Everywhere? Notes on the Interpretation of *Voces Magicae*' in S. Noegel, J. Walker and B. Wheeler (eds.) *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Late Ancient and Late Antique World* (Pennsylvania State University, 2003) p. 69.

easily conclude that Jesus understood these words to have a magical efficacy which could only be achieved by speaking the word in its original language.⁶⁰ However, David Aune suggests that these words did not differ from Jesus' natural language since Aramaic was most likely the language that Jesus spoke, therefore these words are the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus.⁶¹ If these powerful healing words were spoken by Jesus in his native dialect then this does not completely discount the possibility that they were used by Jesus as a magical incantation, however we must consider the alternative possibility that the author of these healing stories is responsible for preserving Jesus' words in their original language and therefore it is the author who is ultimately responsible for any implications of magical technique.

Perhaps the author of the original stories believed that the commands given by Jesus had a magical function and he was also familiar with the importance of preserving words of power in their original language. The translation into Greek that follows both Aramaic transliterated words may be necessary to ensure that the Aramaic words would remain in any subsequent translations of these stories, thereby implying that the original author of the stories understood these to be magical words that must not be translated. Or perhaps the author of the story himself did not consider the words to be magical but felt compelled to include them as such due to the fact that they were well-known magical formulas that were commonly associated with Jesus' healing ministry? If the words spoken by Jesus were unfamiliar to his audience or considered by them to have a magical

⁶⁰ The preservation of the Aramaic word אֶתְפַּתַּח in Mk. 7:34 suggests to Micklem that the word was believed to possess a 'peculiar potency' (E. R. Micklem, *Miracles and the New Psychology*, p. 115).

⁶¹ Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity', p. 1534.

efficacy, then these 'catchphrase' magical words may have been adopted by observers eager to perform the same miracles and hence the widespread circulation of these words may have led the author of these stories to consider it necessary to include them in his narratives. The possibility that these words were used as magical formulas following Jesus' death is supported by Morton Smith who states that the saying *talitha kum* 'circulated without translation as a magical formula'.⁶² Smith draws his evidence from Acts 9:36-41 and proposes that the disciple whom Peter raises is named Tabitha (Ταβιθά) as a result of a mistranslation of the word *talitha*. Hence Peter's words 'Tabitha, get up' (Ταβιθά, ἀνάστηθι, Acts 9: 40) are to be understood as the corruption or misinterpretation of a magical formula.⁶³

Chirping, muttering and groaning

Before giving the command ἐφάθα in Mk. 7:34, the author of Mark mentions an additional verbal technique which has its parallels in the ancient magical tradition; Jesus 'groaned' (ἐστέναξεν) before he gave the healing command. In reference to this groan, Vincent Taylor states:

'although sighing and groaning belong to the technique of mystical magic..., only a love for the bizarre rather than a sober exegesis will find in the groaning of Jesus anything other than a sign of His deep feeling and compassion for the sufferer.'⁶⁴

⁶² Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 95.

⁶³ The disciple's name is given in Aramaic (Ταβιθά) and Greek (Δορκάς) in Acts 9: 36 and both these names have the identical translation 'gazelle' (this is footnoted in the RSV at Acts. 9:36: 'The name Tabitha in Aramaic and the name Dorcas in Greek mean gazelle').

⁶⁴ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 355.

In response to Taylor's comments, I would suggest that interpreting the word στενάζω in this passage in terms of Jesus' emotional response is problematic. Not only do the evangelists systematically avoid reference to Jesus' emotions but when the term occurs elsewhere in the New Testament (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2, 4; James 5:9) it is linked with an unpleasant emotional state such as anxiety or distress.⁶⁵ For example, in response to the Pharisees' demands for a sign in Mk. 8:11, the author of Mark writes that Jesus ἀναστενάξας τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ ('sighed deeply in his spirit', Mk. 8:12) and in this instance the presence of στενάζω appears to indicate a natural sigh, particularly as the exasperated question that follows reveals that Jesus is in a frustrated or irritated state. If στενάζω is to be interpreted as referring to an emotional state in Mk. 7:34, then are we to think that Jesus was in a similar state of exasperation or anxiety during the healing? John Hull rejects an interpretation of στενάζω in Mk. 7:34 as a natural sigh or indicative of an emotional response and suggests that it should be 'interpreted as therapeutic magic.'⁶⁶ Hull proposes that Jesus sighs in order to imitate the speech that is returning to the man and this suggestion is obviously influenced by Frazer's law of sympathetic, or imitative, magic in which the magician imitates the effect that he wishes to produce.⁶⁷ In addition, although Taylor mentions that 'sighing and groaning belong to the technique of

⁶⁵ For example, John Hull comments: 'in general the accounts of the miracles are remarkable for the lack of interest shown in the emotions of Jesus and his patients.' (Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p. 84).

⁶⁶ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p. 85.

⁶⁷ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p. 84. See Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Chapter 3: 'Sympathetic magic'. Marcel Mauss discusses the various forms of mimetic sympathy in magic, the most common of which are *similia similibus evocantur* (like produces like) and *similia similibus curantur* (like acts upon like, in particular, cures like). (M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) pp. 68-72). It is also worthwhile considering the alternate interpretation proposed by James Dunn that στενάζω in Mk. 7.34 and 8.12 could be an example of glossolalic speech (Dunn J. D. G *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1978) p. 86).

mystical magic', I agree with Hull's criticism that Taylor does not adequately appreciate the magnitude of these activities.⁶⁸

The emission of strange noises was closely associated with the magicians of the ancient world, particularly those engaged in activities involving spiritual beings such as the dead. For instance, the magicians in Isaiah 8:19 who consult the dead and are in possession of a familiar spirit are particularly associated with 'chirping and muttering' ('the necromancers and wizards who chirp and mutter', ואל־הידענים המצפצפים והמהגים, (אל־האבות).⁶⁹ Various other types of unusual noises appear within the magical papyri. For example, in PGM IV. 560 the magician is instructed to ἔπειτα σύρσσον μακρὸν συριγμόν ἔπειτα πόπυσσον ('then make a long hissing sound, next make a popping sound') and later, in verses 578-79, the magician is told: σύρσσον β' καὶ πόπυσσον β' ('make a hissing sound twice and a popping sound twice').⁷⁰ Shouting was also associated with magicians attempting to contact the dead and this behaviour is rather simply explained by Daniel Odgen who states: 'a considerable effort was needed to make oneself heard by the dead buried in the earth.'⁷¹ The broad diversity of noises employed

⁶⁸ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 149, n. 61.

⁶⁹ The translation of המצפצפים as 'chirp' is in accordance with the BDB translation of צָפַץ as 'chirp' (this is further supported by the note in the BDB that the term is onomatopoeic, p. 861). The BDB also translates יָדַעַנִי as 'familiar spirit' (p. 396) and therefore we should probably translate ואל־הידענים as 'ones having a familiar spirit' (for a discussion of familiar spirits, see Chapter V).

⁷⁰ A popping noise (πόπυσμός) and a hissing noise (συριγμός) are also required in PGM XIII. 40-52, 420f and 600. For more on hissing and popping noises, see A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966) pp. 40-43, 228-29.

⁷¹ D. Odgen, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) p. 178.

in the magical papyri is demonstrated by the orchestral cacophony that is PGM VII. 769 – 779:

‘and the first companion of your name is silence (σιγή), the second a popping sound (ποππυσμός), the third groaning (στεναγμός), the fourth hissing (συριγμός), the fifth a cry of joy, the sixth moaning, the seventh barking, the eighth bellowing, the ninth neighing, the tenth a musical sound, the eleventh a sounding wind, the twelfth a wind-creating sound, the thirteenth a coercive sound, the fourteenth a coercive emanation from perfection.’

Groaning was also typically related to the magical manipulation of the dead and the common, albeit often derogatory, title of γοής that was applied to lower class magicians in antiquity is believed to derive from the verb form of γοής (‘to groan’) in view of the loud cries and groans that were used by these magicians to contact the dead.⁷² Therefore we cannot ignore the parallels between groaning as a magical technique and the presence of a groan in Jesus’ healing ministry. Although the term στενάζω is commonly translated as ‘sigh’ in popular bible versions of Mk. 7:34, the force of the term is more clearly expressed by ‘groan’ and this is how it is translated by Betz in the Greek magical papyri (for example, PGM IV. 2491 instructs the magician to ‘raise loud groans (ἀναστενάξας)’).

Campbell Bonner suggests that the groan in Mk. 7:34 is similar to breathing techniques used by prophets or miracle-workers before engaging in prophecy or miracle-working in order to demonstrate that they are possessed by a spirit.⁷³ Breathing techniques are also

⁷² In support of this, see P. Chantraine, *La formation des noms en grec ancien* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1933) p. 267. For more on the definition of γοής and its association with wailing or groaning, see Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (University of California Press, 1999) pp. 105-123.

⁷³ Campbell Bonner, ‘Traces of Thaumaturgic Technique in the Miracles’, *HTR* 20 (1927) p. 174.

employed in the magical papyri and often incorporate mention of a sigh. For instance, precise instructions for a rite requiring breathing techniques, which include a groan (στενάζας), are found in PGM XIII. 941-945:

‘(Breath out, in. Fill up); “EI AI OAI” (pushing more, bellow-howling.) “Come to me, god of gods, AEOEI EI IAO AE OIOTK” (Pull in, fill up, / shutting your eyes. Bellow as much as you can, then, sighing, give out [what air remains] in a hiss.)’

Similarly, in the Mithras Liturgy the operator is told to ‘draw in breath from the rays, drawing up 3 times as much as you can’ (PGM IV 539). Martin Dibelius re-evaluates Mk. 7:34 in light of this exact passage in the Greek magical papyri and interprets Jesus’ sigh as follows:

‘From such passages we may conclude that the ‘sigh’ belongs to the technique of mystical magic. The look and the strong breathing (called ‘sighing’ popularly) are healing media’⁷⁴

Dibelius proposes that the presence of a sigh in the lengthy sequence of unusual behaviour in Mk. 7:34 suggests that it is an equally functional part of the healing process and therefore the sigh should be granted the status of a magical healing method.⁷⁵ I would agree that in light of the extensive use of sighing and breathing techniques within the ancient magical tradition, the sigh in Mk. 7:34 can be convincingly interpreted as a magical technique. Furthermore, this conclusion is drawn not from a ‘love for the

⁷⁴ M. Dibelius, *From Tradition To Gospel*, trans. Betram Lee Woolf (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1971) p. 86.

⁷⁵ ‘The mention of this sigh in between the two moments of the glance which sought and obtained power on the one hand, and the formula “ephatha” on the other hand, makes me feel certain that the sigh also is a medium in the cure.’ (Dibelius, *From Tradition To Gospel*, p. 78).

bizarre', as Vincent Taylor would suggest, but from a careful consideration of the scale and extent of this behaviour recorded in texts detailing the activities of the magician in the ancient world.

Healing Technique 2: the application of materials to the body

The use of certain therapeutic materials by Jesus in the Gospels is often defended against an allegation of magic on the basis that similar medicinal remedies were effectively employed by Jesus' contemporaries without attracting the stigma of magic. Anointing the sick with oil, for example, was a common practice in the ancient world and hence the early reader would naturally infer a medical rather than magical reading when Jesus sends out the twelve to anoint with oil (Mk. 6:13; Lk. 10:34).⁷⁶ The application of saliva, however, is considerably more difficult to distance from magical practice. Although the medicinal value of spittle is extensively recorded throughout antiquity, its close association with magical healing cannot be ignored and therefore, as John Hull warns, 'with the use of spittle we are in the shadowy world where medicine fades into magic and no sharp distinction can be made.'⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Naomi Janowitz comments: 'anointing sick people with olive oil or herbal mixtures was a widespread practice' (Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 42). For a general overview of the biblical use of oil, see D. Lys, 'L'onction dans la Bible' *ETR* 29 (1954) pp. 3-54. For the use of oil in James 5:14-16, see John Christopher Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought*, *JPT* 13 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) pp. 24-28.

⁷⁷ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 76.

The medicinal and magical properties of spittle (Mk. 7:33, 8:23; Jn. 9:6)

The authors of Mark and John report that Jesus applied spittle to the eyes of the blind and the dumb (Mk. 7:33, 8:23 and Jn. 9:6). Saliva was widely reported to have medicinal properties in the ancient world. For example, Celsus and Galen mention its healing properties and Pliny collected together many instances of its use in the treatment of boils, pains, sores, snake bites, epilepsy and eye diseases.⁷⁸ Even modern medical studies have investigated the usefulness of saliva as an antiseptic healing agent.⁷⁹

The merits of saliva for treating eye-diseases in particular are noted in a variety of Jewish, Greek, Roman and early Christian sources.⁸⁰ Egyptian myth tells us that Thoth healed Horus's blind eye by spitting on it and perhaps the most documented account of a saliva healing is that of the Roman emperor Vespasian (A.D. 69) who was approached by a blind man, a follower of the Egyptian god Serapis, who asked him to 'moisten his

⁷⁸ Celsus, *De Medicina* V, 28, 18B; Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, III, VII, 163; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 28. 7. See also 28. 4, 22.

⁷⁹ See A. Vanden Abbeele, P. Courtois and M. Pourtois, 'The Antiseptic Role of Saliva', *Revue Belge de Medecine Dentaire*, 47. 3 (1992) pp. 52-58. For more examples of healing cures in the modern period, see G. Chowdharay-Best, 'Notes on the Healing Properties of Saliva', *Folklore* 86. 3/4 (1975) pp. 198-200. It is not only human saliva that is considered to be efficient in healing wounds, animal saliva was considered equally capable of producing miraculous cures. Boerhaave states that 'it is a known observation among the vulgar, that the saliva is efficacious in cleansing foul wounds, and cicatrizing recent ones; thus dogs by licking their wounds which are accessible, have them heal in a very short time.' (H. Boerhaave, *Institutiones Medicae* (Leyden, 1708), translated as *Lectures on the Theory of Physic* (London, 1751), vol. I, p. 142). For a modern investigation into the healing properties of animal saliva, see A. C. Varshney, D. N. Sharma, M. Singh, S. K. Sharma, J. M. Nigam, 'Therapeutic value of bovine saliva in wound healing: a histomorphological study', *Indian Journal of Experimental Biology (New Delhi)* (1997) 35(5) pp. 535-7.

⁸⁰ The use of spittle for healing purposes is also attested in rabbinical sources (BB 126b; Shab. 14.14d; 18; Sotah. 16d,37).

cheeks and his eyes with saliva.’⁸¹ When Vespasian did so, the blind man’s eyesight was restored. R. Selare demonstrates that cures for sore eyes which require a combination of spittle and clay, perhaps directly influenced by John’s Gospel, have survived right up to the modern day.⁸² However, most ancient cures involving spittle do not incorporate medical language into their instructions, but instead involve ritualistic elements which suggest that the efficacy of the result produced owes its success not to the physical properties of saliva itself, but to a symbolic usage that is based on inherent superstitions surrounding the magical employment of saliva. For example, Pliny’s writings on the ‘medicinal’ properties of spittle often take on a supernatural quality which betrays an underlying conviction in its magical potency:

‘The best of all safeguards against serpents is the saliva of a fasting human being. But our daily experience may teach us yet other values of its use. We spit on epileptics (*comitiales morbos*) in a fit, that is, we throw back the infection. In a similar way we ward off witchcraft (*fascinationes*) and the bad luck that follows meeting a person lame in the right leg.’⁸³

⁸¹ Tacitus, *Historia* 4. 8; Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 7.

⁸² ‘Among the Irish peasants fasting spittle is considered of great efficacy for sore eyes, especially if used mixed with clay taken from a holy well. This is made into a paste and applied to the eyes, and it is said that “nothing beats the fasting spittle for blindness”. Saliva mixed with sand and then applied to the eyes, nostrils or forehead of the patient is used in Khordofan, or the operator may spit on the patient three times after reciting a spell or passage from the Kuran’ (R. Selare, ‘A Collection of Saliva Superstitions’ *Folklore* 50. 4 (1939) p. 350). The value of mud alone for treating eye troubles is recorded by the Roman physician Serenus Sammonicus in his *De medicina praecepta*: ‘Si tumor insolitus typho se tollat inani, Turgentes oculos uili circumline caeno’ (Serenus Sammonicus, *De Med. Praec.* 225, 226).

⁸³ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 28.7.35. Pliny also comments: ‘it is the practice in all cases where medicine is employed, to spit three times on the ground, and to conjure the malady as often; the object being to aid the operation of the remedy employed. It is usual, too, to mark a boil, when it first makes its appearance, three times with fasting spittle’ (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 28. 7.).

Pliny's observation regarding the prevention of epilepsy relates directly to the magical use of spittle in the aversion of evil contagion. Both ancient and modern studies into folk-magic attribute to spittle the power to avert evil and spitting when performing spells and healings was thought to keep away any malign influences that might jeopardise the effectiveness of the spell.⁸⁴ Epilepsy was greatly feared in antiquity since it was regarded as a disease that resulted from demonic possession. Consequently, many ancient writers relate the custom of spitting three times onto your chest at the sight of an epileptic in order to keep the possessing demon from leaving the epileptic and entering one's own body.⁸⁵ That the executor is required to perform the spell on himself rather than on the epileptic exemplifies the symbolic nature of this act.⁸⁶

A widespread confidence in the inherent magical powers of spittle and the act of spitting is demonstrated throughout history by the numerous ancient customs and rituals which use spitting as a basis for a covenant⁸⁷, as a means to increase luck⁸⁸ or to curse enemies and the efficacy of charms, cures and exorcisms was believed to be increased by spitting

⁸⁴ For example, Pliny recommends the use of spitting to avert witchcraft (see quotation on pg. 131 above) and a substantial number of spitting charms are used to ward off the evil eye. For more on the practice of spitting to avert evil, see Frank W. Nicolson, 'The Saliva Superstition in Classical Literature', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 8 (1897) pp. 35-39.

⁸⁵ Nicolson, 'The Saliva Superstition in Classical Literature', p. 30f.

⁸⁶ A similar use of spittle is recounted by Theocritus: 'Thrice on my breast I spit to guard me safe, From fascinating charms' (Theocritus, *Idyll*, VI, 39).

⁸⁷ As a basis for a covenant, see J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 21:9.

⁸⁸ Spitting in order to increase luck is mentioned by Pliny who observes that boxers spit on their fists for luck before a fight (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 28.7) and R. Selare notes that 'it is the common practice of hucksters, pedlars, fisherwomen and applewomen to spit on the first money they receive for luck' (R. Selare, 'A Collection of Saliva Superstitions', p. 363). For other magical uses of spittle within a modern-day context, see Fanny D. Bergen, 'Some Saliva Charms', *JAF* 3. 8 (1890) pp. 51-59.

during, or after, their application. Under further investigation, most spittle cures rarely have solid grounding in medical observations, but instead rely on a charm-like quality founded upon a superstitious belief from which they take their effectiveness. Therefore, as John Hull suggests:

‘The use of spittle was not recommended because of its rational therapeutic value but because of its efficacy as healing magic.’⁸⁹

The magical, rather than medicinal, attributes of these cures ensured that these methods were commonly employed by magicians and David Aune places spittle cures among techniques that were ‘well-known to both Jewish and Graeco-Roman magical practitioners’.⁹⁰ In classical literature in particular, it is often the case that the cure cannot be achieved by the application of *any* spittle, as would be the case with a medicinal cure, but the healing spittle must come from a magician or an individual with divine standing. Upon re-examining the account of Vespasian’s healing of the blind man, it is apparent that the man who approached Vespasian did not require simply anyone’s spittle but specifically Vespasian’s spittle, thereby suggesting that spittle in itself has no medicinal value and its healing capability is directly linked to the power or importance of its bearer. In a similar fashion, it is a *sorceress* in Petronius’ *Satyricon* who treats Encolpius’ impotence by taking some dirt and mixing it with her spittle⁹¹ and John Hull points out that the people who came to the temples of Asclepius did not go to ordinary animals to be cured, but specifically to the sacred beasts in the temple.⁹²

⁸⁹ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 78.

⁹⁰ David E. Aune, ‘Magic in Early Christianity’, p.1537.

⁹¹ Petronius, *The Satyricon*, 131.

⁹² Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 77.

The status of the carrier of the saliva becomes particularly important when considering the healing process according to the principle of the *extended personality*. The rationale of this theory dictates that contact with a person, or something belonging to a person, allows the power of that person to transmit or influence the other. Spittle, hair, and nails were typically considered by the ancients to be extensions of a man's body or spirit and from this theory emerged the universal system of sympathetic magic; the belief that a man can be injured or bewitched through the magical use of his hair/nail cuttings and his saliva.⁹³ Since saliva was thought to be bound intrinsically with the life, or soul, of its bearer, it was therefore considered to be able to transfer life and this notion is still popular in many modern-day cultures. Consequently, anthropological studies often report that a healer will spit in order to augment the health of the victim and R. Selare demonstrates that this theory of sympathetic magic underlies the whole belief system surrounding the magical power of spittle:

‘The universal belief in the magical properties is thus made evident, and underlying it all, is the principle of the life force of man's saliva, so closely connected with his blood and the whole of his person. From this arises its power to create and transfer life, to cure and prevent so many ills and evils of all kinds, to make binding covenants, to ensure good fortune, and where necessary to take vengeance on one's enemies’⁹⁴

⁹³ Sir James Frazer examines this phenomenon at length in his book *The Golden Bough*, particularly Chapter 3: ‘Sympathetic magic’. With special reference to spittle, Frazer comments: ‘the spittle is part of the man, and whatever is done to it will have a corresponding effect on him’ (21:9). For the use of hair in Greco-Roman curse tablets, see Daniel Ogden, ‘Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds’ in V. Flint, R. Gordon, G. Luck and D. Ogden (eds.) *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, vol. 2 (London: Athlone Press, 1999) pp. 14- 15.

⁹⁴ R. Selare, ‘A Collection of Saliva Superstitions’, p. 366. S. Eitrem notes: ‘spittle, like every secretion of the body and, indeed the πνεῦμα itself, is by itself a vehicle of δύναμις.’ (S. Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, 2nd, rev. and enl. ed., Symbolae Osloenses. Fasc. Supplet. 20 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1966), p. 56).

With these common superstitions in mind, are we to understand that the Gospel writers intended Jesus' application of spittle to be a demonstration of his adoption of first-century medical techniques or simply his familiarity with magical superstitions circulating amongst the people? There is no evidence from ancient sources to suggest that saliva was a cure for deafness and therefore the author of Mark cannot be appealing to popular medicine in Mk. 7:33.⁹⁵ On the contrary, given the superstitions regarding spittle that often underlies these types of cures and their close association with magic, Morton Smith states that 'we find Jesus, like other magicians, smearing spittle on his patients or using a salve made with spittle.'⁹⁶ In support of Jesus' familiarity with superstitions regarding the use of saliva, John Pilch suggests that Jn. 9:1-15 provides an insight into the Historical Jesus buying into popular magical uses of spittle to avert evil and the demonic cause of the disease:

'He uses saliva because it was widely believed that saliva gave protection particularly against the evil eye, which perhaps the majority of people there would have assumed the blind man possessed.'⁹⁷

The widespread use of spittle as a defence against the evil eye would greatly support this theory, especially since it appears that spitting was often employed in exorcisms or as a small sacrifice of oneself to appease the demon causing the disease.⁹⁸ By performing healings using spittle within an environment that is receptive to its magical virtues, a healer is clearly exploiting his patient's superstitious inclinations and thereby greatly

⁹⁵ Although Pliny does refer to its effectiveness when removing foreign objects from the ear (*Nat. Hist.*, 28. 7).

⁹⁶ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 128.

⁹⁷ John J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) p. 134.

⁹⁸ R. Selare, 'A Collection of Saliva Superstitions', p. 357f.

increasing the patient's expectation of a cure, particularly if the healer is of a high-esteemed, or preferably divine, status. The symbolical usage of spittle, combined with the patient's faith in the divine standing of the healer, would have been a very powerful remedy in the mind of a patient suffering from a psychosomatic illness and Hendrik van der Loos introduces this possibility when he suggests that Jesus applies spittle in order to adopt the magical worldview through which he 'enters the mental world of the patient and gains his confidence.'⁹⁹

Since mention of saliva or spitting is restricted to Mk. 7:33, 8:23 and Jn. 9:6 and does not occur elsewhere within the New Testament in a healing context, this suggests that if the Historical Jesus employed spittle as a healing agent then he very rarely used this particular method.¹⁰⁰ However, as the authors of Matthew and Luke are highly sensitive to magical techniques, as previously indicated when considering the censorship of foreign words of power, they may have chosen to omit any mention of spittle due its association with magic and this may explain the noticeable absence of spittle in the Matthean account of the healing of the blind and dumb (Mt. 15:29-31) and the elimination of the entire story in the Gospel of Luke. We must also bear in mind that the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22-26) contains a technique that has been previously identified as a hallmark of magical practice; namely the *reapplication* of techniques that are not effective on their initial application (see Chapter II). The preservation of spittle cures in

⁹⁹ Hendrik van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. W. C. van Unnik et al., trans. T. S. Preston, *NovTSup* 9 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965) p. 310.

¹⁰⁰ Other instances of spitting take the form of ἐμπύω. This suggests spitting with contempt and is clearly not medicinal (see Mk. 14:65; 15:19; Lk. 18:32, and in the Old Testament: Num. 12:14; Deut. 25:9; Job 17:6).

the Gospel of Mark suggests that the evangelist considered these cures to be an unavoidable inclusion. Again, perhaps Jesus' use of spittle cures was common knowledge amongst the populace when the author of Mark came to construct his Gospel. If so, then perhaps these passages record *bone-fide* instances of the Historical Jesus using magical materials and exploiting magical superstitions when engaging in his healing activities.

Healing Technique 3: touch and the transference of Jesus' δύναμις in the Gospels

Therapeutic touch was an important method of healing in antiquity and the sick would often seek contact with powerful individuals from whom it was believed their touch alone would suffice to bring about a cure. The touch of a powerful miracle worker even had the potential to resurrect the dead; for example, Philostratus reports that Apollonius of Tyana stopped the funeral procession of a young bride, touched her, spoke inaudibly to her and she immediately came back to life.¹⁰¹ In the Old Testament, Elijah and Elisha are depicted as resurrecting a boy by stretching themselves full length on his corpse (in 1 Kings 17:21 and 2 Kings 4:34 respectively). Even contact with the saintly dead was thought to heal and Augustine demonstrates this in the story of a blind man whose sight was restored when he touched the remains of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius with his handkerchief.¹⁰²

Current medical research has undertaken thorough investigation into the healing properties of touch and both charismatic religious groups and holistic therapists

¹⁰¹ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 4. 45.

¹⁰² Augustine, *Confessions*, 9. 7. 16.

recommend the procedure of 'laying on hands' as a method of healing.¹⁰³ Although many contemporary religious groups maintain that their abilities to heal through touch derive from a higher spiritual power, the ancients did not strictly rely upon spiritual sources for this ability but most often appealed to a neutral, independent and amoral power that was held within and emanated from certain individuals or objects and could be transferred through contact with that person. This power, categorised by modern anthropologists under the term *mana*, permeates both the ancient and modern magical worldviews to the extent that Lévi-Strauss states:

‘conceptions of the *mana* type are so frequent and so widespread that we should ask ourselves if we are not confronted with a permanent and universal form of thought.’¹⁰⁴

There is evidence which suggests that *mana* was considered to be an active source of miracle-working power during Jesus' lifetime. For example, John Hull proposes that miracle-working power in the New Testament, in the Gospel of Luke in particular, 'rests upon a primitive conception of *mana*.'¹⁰⁵ Various attempts have been made by anthropologists to explain the mystical mechanics behind touch as a method of transferring *mana*. Most studies have made a direct, or indirect, appeal to the laws of

¹⁰³ See Thomas J. Csordas, 'Elements of Charismatic Persuasion and Healing', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 2. 2 (1988), pp. 121-142. Also, J. A. Simington, G. P. Laing, 'Effects of therapeutic touch on anxiety in the institutionalized elderly', *Clinical Nursing Research* 2. 4 (1993) pp. 438-50, and M. Giasson, L. Bouchard, 'Effects of Therapeutic Touch on the Well-Being of Persons with Terminal Cancer', *Journal of Holistic Nursing* 16. 3 (1998) pp. 383-398.

¹⁰⁴ C. Lévi-Strauss, 'Introduction a l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss' in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950) pp. xliii. For a thorough investigation into the theory of *mana*, see M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) pp. 108 – 121. See also Walter Grundmann, 'δύναμαι/δύναμις', *TDNT* vol 2, pp. 287-91.

¹⁰⁵ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 108-9.

sympathetic magic by asserting that energy is transmitted according to the law of extended personality (in which contact with a person allows the patient to share in his power) or the Frazerian theory of ‘magical contagion’ (which Mauss suggests ‘is already one of the best known of all magical and religious notions’).¹⁰⁶

All three Synoptic authors mention touch as a method used by Jesus to heal the sick. For example, Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law in Mark’s Gospel by taking her by the hand and lifting her up (Mk. 1:31) and he also touches the leper when healing him (Mk. 1:41).¹⁰⁷ By portraying Jesus as able to heal the sick through contact alone, did the Gospel writers presume that Jesus’ healing power had a mana-like quality? A magical or mana-like interpretation is certainly implied on occasions in the Gospels in which this healing power appears to be unavailable (Mk. 6:5¹⁰⁸) or Jesus experiences fluctuations or intermittency in the presence of his power. For example, Lk. 5:17 tells us ‘the power of the Lord was present (ἦν) for him to heal’, which in turn suggests that there were other occasions when it was not present. By paying particular attention to αὐτόν in this passage, John Hull proposes that the reader should understand this phrase as ‘the power of the Lord was in him to heal’ and he suggests that this accounts for instances in which

¹⁰⁶ M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, p. 66. See J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* 3:3 (‘on contagious magic’).

¹⁰⁷ For the ‘laying on of hands’ as a method of healing within the Gospels, see Mk. 1:41; 6:5; 16:18; Mt. 20:34; Lk 4:40. See also Robert F. O’Toole and David P. Wright, ‘Hands, Laying on of’ in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) vol. 3, pp. 47-49.

¹⁰⁸ Although in this particular instance Jesus appears to refuse to perform a miracle since it is required for spectacle only. Similarly, Eunapius reveals in his *Lives of the Sophists* that Iamblichus refused to do a miracle when asked by one of his disciples since he thought that it was ‘irreverent to the gods’ (Eunapius, *The Lives of the Sophists*, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, The Loeb Classical Library, (London, 1921) p. 369).

Jesus feels power go out of him.¹⁰⁹ An example of this apparent loss of power is found in Mk. 5:30//Lk. 8:46 and this passage provides valuable evidence that Jesus' healing power had an independent nature and, most importantly, that this healing power had mana-like properties.

The woman with a haemorrhage (Mk. 5:25-34//Mt. 9:18-22//Lk. 8:43-48)

The magical overtones present in the story of the woman with a haemorrhage confirm that it is, as John Meier notes, a 'star witness' for an impersonal, magical power at work in Jesus' ministry.¹¹⁰ All three Synoptic accounts state that the woman who approaches Jesus to be healed has been suffering with her illness for twelve years (Mk. 5: 25//Mt. 9: 20//Lk. 8:43) and the cluster of aorist participles in the Markan version conveys the sense that the woman has been seeking healing for some time (Mk. 5:25-27). The woman's motivation to approach Jesus is revealed in the evangelists' descriptions of her inner thoughts; she believes that if she can simply touch Jesus' clothing then she will be healed (Mk. 5:28//Mt. 9:21). When the woman touches Jesus in Mark's Gospel, the healing power reacts immediately (εὐθύς) and Jesus only becomes aware that a healing has taken place after the event and when he senses that 'power had gone forth from him' (τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ δύναμιν ἐξελοῦσθαι, Mk. 5:30). Not only is Jesus unaware that he has transmitted healing power, but he remains unaware afterwards as to who touched him ('who touched my garments?', Mk. 5:30). The statement 'someone touched me' in Lk. 8:46 may well indicate that the author of Luke preferred to associate the transferral of healing power

¹⁰⁹ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 106.

¹¹⁰ Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, p. 709.

with Jesus' physical body rather than his clothes, particularly since there are other occasions in which the author of Luke is uncomfortable with the transmission of power through Jesus' clothes.¹¹¹ For example, although the observation that healing power could be received by simply touching Jesus' clothes is made even more unequivocal in Mk. 6:56//Mt. 14:36 ('they besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well'), the author of Luke simply reduces this contact to 'the crowd sought to touch him' (Lk. 6:19).

Transference of Jesus' healing power through his clothes and, most importantly, without his knowledge, suggests that his healing power behaves automatically, independently and more like the ancient concept of *mana*. Morton Smith recognises the independent nature of Jesus' power in this passage and suggests that it 'was thought to work of itself, like an electric charge, without his volition.'¹¹² Perhaps in an attempt to correct a manistic interpretation of the potency of Jesus' healing power, all three evangelists stress the importance of faith and/or add a blessing from Jesus that is required in order for the healing to take full effect, thereby suggesting that the healing power was transferred at the will of Jesus. The author of Mark detracts from an automatic, manistic transference of power and stresses that faith was the active element which allowed the healing to take place ('your faith has made you well', ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε, Mk. 5:34). Similarly, the author of Matthew preserves the woman's touch but includes a blessing given by Jesus before the healing can take place, effectively shifting the emphasis from the act of

¹¹¹ In Jewish literature, the garments of a holy person were believed to hold a certain magical power (see Craig A. Evans, *Luke, NIBC*, vol. 3, p. 138). cf. also Elijah's mantle in 2 Kings 2: 8-24.

¹¹² Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 127.

touching to the initial faith of the woman (Mt. 9:22). We will come to address the importance of the faith of the woman in this passage in Chapter VIII, but for the time being it is important to observe that faith is not an important factor in the Lukan version of this story (Lk. 8:40-56) since there is no mention that the woman believes that she will be healed by touching Jesus and the healing is almost accidental.

Some commentators, such as Graham Twelftree, reject an automatic, mana-like interpretation of Jesus' healing powers in this passage and prefer instead to highlight the relationship between Jesus' δύνάμις and the Holy Spirit.¹¹³ The attribution of Jesus' miracle-working capabilities to the Holy Spirit is a particularly Lukan idea and it is within Luke's Gospel that we often find the terms δύνάμις and πνεῦμα used interchangeably, as well as the 'power of the Lord' (δύνάμις κυρίου e.g. Lk. 5:17) and the 'power of the spirit' (δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος, e.g. Lk. 4:14). The author of Luke also has the crowds attribute Jesus' healings to God (cf. Lk. 5:25-26; 7:16; 9:43; 13:13, 17:15; 18:43). However, although most scholars would agree that the author of Luke makes an explicit association between δύνάμις and God or the Holy Spirit, some individuals, such as Eduard Schweizer and subsequently Max Turner, disagree and argue that Luke does not regard the Spirit as an agent of Jesus' miracles.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ G. Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker*, pp. 73-76, 118-119, 168, 338.

¹¹⁴ Schweizer states: 'though the miracles are important for Luke, they are never ascribed to the Spirit' (Eduard Schweizer, 'pneuma' in *TDNT* 6: 406). Turner suggests that Luke associates the Spirit with prophetic speech and consigns the miracles to Jesus' δύνάμις, concluding that 'Luke never directly associates an exorcism or a healing with the Spirit' (Max Turner, 'The Spirit and the Power of Jesus' Miracles in the Lucan Conception', *NovT* 33 (1991) p. 124).

Since God's spirit is represented in the Old Testament as a power that would be temporarily bestowed upon people to allow them to perform a miracle, then a spiritual source could account for the apparent intermittency in Jesus' healing power.¹¹⁵ However, accounting for the fluctuations in Jesus' δύναμις on the basis of its reliance on a selective bequest from God is a theory that is contradicted by Jesus' ability to transmit this power to the disciples (Mt. 10:1//Mk. 6:7-13//Lk. 9:1).¹¹⁶ Furthermore, it is difficult to situate the Holy Spirit within this pericope with the aim of excluding a mana-like understanding of Jesus' healing power as the Spirit is noticeably absent in all three Synoptic accounts. All three Synoptic authors agree that there are no prayers or imprecations *asking* the Spirit to perform the healing and it is not subsequently accredited with the miracle when Jesus discovers that the healing has occurred.

Some attempts have been made to explain the apparent absence of God or the Holy Spirit throughout this account. The most frequent explanation is that Jesus is to be understood as a charismatic healer and therefore he is not required to make a request. For example, Hengel explains that there is no need for Jesus to appeal to the Spirit since his power is drawn from his immediate relation to God and similarly Loos suggests that Jesus' power

¹¹⁵ For example, in Judges 14:6 the Spirit of God comes upon Samson to endow him with great strength.

¹¹⁶ Hull observes: '[Jesus'] power can be passed from one person to another. It is not a moral quality nor a learned skill but an acquisition, a property which can be conveyed either at will of the donor, as in Luke 9.1 or without it, as in 8.46.' (Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 107).

is a gift from God and therefore Jesus has authority over how it is applied.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, by excluding an appeal to a spiritual third-party and implying that Jesus' healing power is an in-dwelling energy that is held within himself, all three Synoptic authors portray Jesus as a miracle-worker who is no longer, to use Werner Kahl's terminology, a 'mediator of numinous power' but is performing his miracles in the role of a 'bearer of numinous power.'¹¹⁸ If the reader of the Gospels is to understand that Jesus' in-dwelling, numinous power is a mana-like energy, then we can disconnect this particular healing from any divinely appointed power source and situate it firmly within the realms of magic. However, if we must accept that Jesus' healing power derives from a spiritual source in this instance, then we must also permit the possibility that this spiritual power is owned by Jesus *within himself*.

Many scholars have found it difficult to account for Jesus' apparent role as a possessor of spiritual power in Mk. 5:25-34 and parallels. For example, John Hull proposes that, in Luke's account in particular, Jesus' δύναμις is to be understood as an amalgamation of a

¹¹⁷ M. Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981) p. 63. Hendrik van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* ed. W. C. van Unnik et al., trans. T. S. Preston, *NovTSup*, vol. 9 (Leiden,: E. J. Brill, 1965) p. 188. Twelftree suggests that although Jesus was mindful that his powers derived from God, he was also aware that he had complete control over these powers: 'whereas Jesus may have seen God to be involved in what he was doing in his miracles, he believed that he was operating out of his own resources as a miracle-worker' (Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999) pp. 265 -266).

¹¹⁸ Werner Kahl, 'New Testament Miracle Stories in their Religious-Historical Setting: A Religionsgeschichtliche Comparison from a Structural Perspective', *FRLANT*, vol. 163 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994). In addition, W. G. Kümmel notes that in this passage 'Jesus is seen as the possessor of a supernatural miraculous power which belongs to him by his very nature' (W. G. Kümmel, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1983) p. 122).

mana-like power and spiritual power:

‘It is regarded by Luke as a substance, a mana-like charge of divine potency, spiritual in so far as it emanates from the world of spirits, but as actual, as vital as the beings who possess it.’¹¹⁹

However, by identifying Jesus’ possession of a spiritual power and emphasising his jurisdiction over how it is applied, we are firmly laying the foundations of spiritual magic. Although compounding strata of Christian tradition has ensured that an inclination towards a Lukan connection between Jesus’ δύναμις and the Holy Spirit remains the default option for the majority of modern readers of the Gospels, a divine source of Jesus’ healing power would not have been the primary option for a first-century audience. The early reader would certainly have been familiar with the ancient worldview which maintained that the environment was filled with an abundance of demons, angels, souls of the dead and numerous other invisible, spiritual powers that could be manipulated, most often through magical means, to achieve similar miraculous results as those accredited to Jesus in the Gospels. Since the magicians of antiquity often had no need to appeal to these spirits in order to obtain a miracle as the spirits, or even the gods, were restrained, or bound, in such a way that they would simply perform the miracle on request, the reader operating within this spiritual environment may have presumed that Jesus had possession of a spiritual power source in the same way that magicians and mediums in antiquity had possession of a spirit.

¹¹⁹ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 105.

With the spectre of the Holy Spirit lingering in the background of many of the healing accounts in the Gospels and Jesus' opponents also recognising a spiritual power at work in his miracles, it is necessary to shift our attention from an examination of techniques of *natural* magic and consider whether there is evidence in the Gospels which suggests that Jesus was practicing a form of *spiritual* magic. However, before we make any rash judgements regarding Jesus' magical manipulation of his spiritual powers in the Gospels, we must engage with the theory proposed by Stevan Davies that the relationship between Jesus and his spiritual power-source is to be understood as passive spirit-possession, or 'possession *by*' a spirit.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance and the Origins of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1995).

CHAPTER V

POSSESSED OR POSSESSOR? EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JESUS AND HIS SPIRITUAL ΔYNAMIS WITHIN THE GOSPELS

‘Do you have power over the djinns?’ I asked.

‘I do’

‘Have you captured a djinn?’

‘Yes’

‘God has given me power,’ said the dervish. ‘Now I can finish any problem. I can capture djinns and cast out devils. I can cure headaches, mend broken limbs, restore milk to the breasts of a dry woman.’

His eyes gleamed in the candlelight. ‘Nothing,’ he said, ‘nothing is beyond me.’

~ William Dalrymple, *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi* (1994) pp. 289-290 ~

Morton Smith and Stevan Davies stand firmly at opposing ends of the theoretical and semantic spectrum with regards to their understanding of Jesus’ relationship with the Holy Spirit. Stevan Davies proposes that Jesus was possessed *by* the Spirit and therefore he should be recognised as a ‘spirit-possessed healer’. On the other hand, Morton Smith argues that Jesus was the dominant, controlling force in the relationship and consequently he had ‘possession *of*’ the Spirit. Smith’s theory is deeply unpalatable for Davies who

outlines the disagreement as follows:

‘It was not the relationship: “possession *of*,” but the relationship: “possession *by*,” the fundamental difference being whether the identity of Jesus of Nazareth was thought to be in control of a spirit entity, or whether the identity of Jesus of Nazareth was sometimes thought to have been replaced by a spirit entity. And that makes all the difference in the world.’¹

By elevating the passivity of the individual undergoing a possession experience and emphasising the dominant role of the new persona, Davies’ theory limits the degree of control that Jesus held in the subsequent application of his power and guards against the possibility that he was exerting control over a spirit through the use of magic. However, a brief analysis of the central characteristics of spirit-possession that are repeatedly cited in both ancient and modern studies into this phenomenon swiftly reveals that Davies’ ‘spirit-possessed healer’ is a highly improbable epithet for the Jesus of the Gospels and that it is Smith’s argument that is closer to the mark.

Spirit-possession, the divided self and the ‘strange soul’

T. K. Oesterreich comments in his substantial volume *Possession and Exorcism*, a study of possession in both Christian and non-Christian contexts, that the concept of possession loses its relevance as cultures begin to abandon their belief in spiritual beings.² Although the practice of divine possession is still advocated in our current religious clime by many Christian charismatic groups, a gradual disregard for the existence of spiritual bodies in

¹ Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance and the Origins of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1995) p. 91.

² T. K. Oesterreich, *Possession and Exorcism: Among Primitive Races in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Modern Times* (New York: Causeway Books, 1974) p. 378.

our present-day culture clearly accounts for our generally dismissive attitude towards possession and our tendency to assign it to inferior or irrational forms of thinking. Thus we are inclined to associate spirit-possession with either the anthropological study of primitive ritual, or psychological disturbances belonging to the psychiatric school of mental illness, or we simply reduce it to the harmless and entertaining genre of the Hollywood shocker movie.³

Since the reality of demonic influences was widely recognised in antiquity, possession was much more commonplace amongst the ancients and cases were treated with genuine caution. It is within this cultural framework of spirit-possession that Stevan Davies suggests that we can understand the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit.⁴ Davies attempts to demonstrate that Jesus suffered from psychological episodes in which his original persona (Jesus of Nazareth) was subordinated or replaced by a new,

³ In his comprehensive study of shamanism and spirit-possession, I.M. Lewis observes that possession is often considered 'not for psychologically normal people, but only for the disturbed.' (I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* 2nd ed. (London, Routledge, 1998) p. 161). Similarly, Colleen Ward states in her article 'Spirit Possession and Mental Health: A Psycho-Anthropological Perspective' that although the 1977 study by Bourguignon and Evascu discovered that evidence of trance and possession was present in 90% of a worldwide sample of 488 sample societies, there is 'still the lingering assumption that ritual possession is confined to bizarre cults or primitives and it is generally connected with malformed or maladjusted personalities' (Colleen Ward, 'Spirit Possession and Mental Health: A Psycho-Anthropological Perspective', *Human Relations* 33. 3, (1980) p. 152, citing E. Bourguignon and T. Evascu, 'Altered states of consciousness within a general evolutionary perspective: A holocultural analysis', *Behaviour Science Research* (1977) 12(3) pp. 197-216).

⁴ Stevan Davies indicates that in the spiritual environment of Jesus' time 'the modality of possession...was commonly accepted' and victims of demon possession and spirit-possessed prophets were an everyday encounter (Stevan Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 59).

temporary persona (the Spirit of God). During these possession episodes, Davies claims that Jesus was able to operate as a spirit-possessed healer. However, he 'should not be identified as himself but as another person, the spirit of God.'⁵ A deviation from or replacement of the natural personality of an individual is generally considered to be a major indication of spirit possession.⁶ For example, Alfred Loisy states:

'le caractère pathologique de la possession consiste dans l'éclipse totale ou partielle, continue ou intermittente, de la personnalité.'⁷

A change in personality is generally considered to result from either the temporary loss of the practitioner's normal persona or 'soul', hence the anthropological term 'soul-loss', or the temporary possession of the practitioner by an external, supernatural power.⁸ It is most often the case that both changes occur simultaneously and the soul is replaced immediately by another. Oesterreich observes that in a state of typical possession, the normal and possessing personas cannot simultaneously exist alongside one another and

⁵ Stevan Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 18.

⁶ For a definition of possession as the replacement of the individual's personality with that of a spirit entity, see E. Bourguignon and T. Evascu, 'Altered states of consciousness within a general evolutionary perspective: A holocultural analysis', *Behaviour Science Research* (1977) 12(3) pp. 197-216).

⁷ A. Loisy, *Les Évangiles Synoptiques* vol. 1 (Ceffonds: 1908) p. 452. For a similar observation regarding possession by demonic spirits, see Joshua Trachtenberg who comments: 'Demons who have taken possession of a human body exercise such complete control over it that the personality and the will of the victim are extinguished' (J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish magic and Superstition: A Study of Folk Religion* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) p. 51).

⁸ For more on 'soul-loss', see I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, pp. 40-43. For soul-loss as a characteristic of Greek shamanism, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

so the original persona is replaced, the result of which is as follows:

‘The subject...considers himself as the new person...and envisages his former being as quite strange, as if it were another’s...the statement that possession is a state in which side by side with the first personality a second has made its way into the consciousness is also very inaccurate... it is the first personality which has been replaced by a second.’⁹

In accordance with this type of possession behaviour, Davies proposes that the observation of the people in Mk. 3:21 that ‘he is beside himself’ (ὅτι ἑξέστη) literally means that Jesus was ‘absent from himself’.¹⁰ This phrase, therefore, is evidence that Jesus was possessed by an external entity in this instance. To support this possession theory, Davies examines Jesus’ reported behaviour in the Gospels and isolates passages in which he believes that Jesus is demonstrating typical traits of possession behaviour.

Studies of both demonical and divine possession have identified a set of common behavioural patterns that are associated with the individual undergoing a possession experience. The first indication of possession is a change to the *speech* of the possessed and it is not uncommon in both ancient and modern reports of possession to encounter reference to an alternative persona speaking in the first person through the patient or an alteration in speech patterns, pitch or timbre.¹¹ In light of this, Davies directs his readers

⁹ T. K Oesterreich, *Possession: Demonical and other* (London: Kegan Paul, 1930) p. 39.

¹⁰ Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 95.

¹¹ Oesterreich writes: ‘At the moment when the countenance alters, a more or less changed voice issues from the mouth of the person in the fit. The new intonation also corresponds to the character of the new individuality...in particular the top register of the voice is displaced: the feminine voice is transformed into a bass one, for in all the cases of possession which has hitherto been my lot to know the new individuality was a man’ (Oesterreich, *Possession and Exorcism*, pp. 19-20). Similarly, Erika Bourguignon discovered that the possessed individual usually exhibits a change of voice (E. Bourguignon, *Possession* (San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp, 1976).

to Mk. 13:11 ('for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit') and suggests that this passage deals directly with alter-persona spirit speech in which the words are not formulated by the individual himself but originate from the new, dominant persona that has acquired control of the speech of its host.¹²

A second archetypal indication of possession is an increase in motor movements, known as motor hyper-excitement. When the possessing spirit replaces the original persona of the host it often takes control of the motor movements of the individual, thus exhibiting observable behavioural and psychological irregularities.¹³ Naomi Janowitz remarks that a primary model of exorcism in antiquity was based on a 'suspicion of the body' and therefore 'in the first centuries any type of spontaneous and unwilled bodily gesture might be a sign of possession by a hostile being'.¹⁴ Evidence of the physical symptoms of possession in Jesus' behaviour is proposed by Campbell Bonner, who suggests that in the account of the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:33) the statement ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν should be translated as 'the Spirit set him in frenzy and he threw himself into disorder.'¹⁵ Bonner adds that the phrase in verse 38 ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ also seems to mean 'in suppressed (or inward) frenzy'.¹⁶ I would suggest, however, that

¹² Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 29, cf. p. 46.

¹³ Typical possession 'is nevertheless distinguished from ordinary somnambulistic states by its intense motor and emotional excitement' (Oesterreich, *Possession*, p. 39). 'Muscle rigidity and loss of control of gross motor movements' are mentioned by Davies (Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 33).

¹⁴ Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (London: Routledge, 2001) pp. 37-38. Cf. P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1978) p. 25.

¹⁵ Campbell Bonner, 'Traces of Thaumaturgic Techniques in the Miracles', *HTR* 20. 3 (1927) p. 176.

¹⁶ Bonner, 'Traces of Thaumaturgic Techniques in the Miracles', p. 176.

interpreting ἐμβριμάομαι as indicative of possession frenzy ignores the sense of anger and indignation that is associated with the term. For example, Arndt and Gingrich interpret ἐμβριμάομαι as 'to snort with anger' and propose that we should interpret the word as 'an expression of anger and displeasure'.¹⁷ It appears that the presence of the term within this passage simply serves to indicate that Jesus was angry and does not signify that he was exhibiting motor hyper-excitement or any other physical manifestation of possession frenzy.

If we are to recognise that the Historical Jesus was subject to periods of spirit-possession and that he was exhibiting all the characteristic symptoms of a possessed individual, then we would expect to find evidence within the Gospels of an initial possession experience in which Jesus first encounters his possessing spirit. Stevan Davies suggests that the Gospel writers record this event and that it takes place at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan (Mt. 3:1-17//Mk. 1:9-11//Lk. 3:21-22//Jn. 1:32-34).

The baptism as the moment of spirit-possession

The bizarre imagery of the descent of a dove and a voice coming from the heavens that are used by the Gospel authors when describing Jesus' baptism in the Jordan (Mk. 1:9-11//Mt. 3:1-17//Lk. 3:21-22//Jn. 1:32-34¹⁸) are found nowhere else in the Gospels and

¹⁷ William Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) p. 254.

¹⁸ Although the Johannine version of the baptism is recounted as a vision by John the Baptist, I am including it here as it retains the imagery of the descending dove.

they are generally considered to be a poetic vehicle through which the Gospel authors present a messianic moment, make revelations regarding Jesus' divine identity and highlight his relationship with God. Stevan Davies claims that since the baptismal accounts provided by the Gospel authors meet John Meier's criterion of multiple attestation (the story appears in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), the criterion of embarrassment (the story is not compatible with the interests of early Christianity) and the criterion of dissimilarity (there is no mention of a descending Holy Spirit in other Jewish or early Christian sources), the baptism accounts can therefore be considered to be a historically reliable record of events.¹⁹ Davies then suggests that the baptism accounts essentially describe Jesus' 'initial spirit-possession experience'.²⁰ This adoptionist *cum* possession theory proposes that Jesus was not possessed by the Spirit prior to his baptism and that he underwent a 'psychological transformation'²¹ during which he was 'anointed' with the power to begin his messianic work.²² To regard the baptism as the moment of the endowment of spiritual power is reminiscent of the first-century Gnostic doctrine of Cerinthianism and the second-century sect of the Ebionites, both of whom believed that

¹⁹ Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 64.

²⁰ Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 148.

²¹ Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 65.

²² Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 148: 'If Jesus believed himself to be one who was anointed by God, it is anything but unlikely that the anointing in question was his initial possession experience.' Although not in reference to possession *per se*, Samuel Dickey states: 'our Synoptic evangelists regard the Baptism, and this descent of the Spirit in particular, as a sort of consecration or anointing of Jesus for his messianic work' (Samuel Dickey, 'The significance of the Baptism of Jesus for his conception of authority', *The Biblical World* 37. 6 (1911) p. 364). In contrast to an adoptionist-possession theory, Max Turner proposes that the story only records a *vision* of the Spirit and not a reception of the Spirit. Turner suggests that the vision is a simple disclosure intended to show that 'from that time the Spirit will be with Jesus as the power to exercise the messianic task' (M. Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Paternoster, 1996) p. 30).

Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit until his baptism and that it abandoned him at the crucifixion.²³

A number of difficulties arise when proposing that the Historical Jesus was spirit-possessed and these will be addressed below (p. 159). However, connotations of spirit-possession may account for the sensitive treatment of the baptismal account by each of the Gospel authors. The author of Matthew has previously explained that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:18-20) and therefore he does not require the baptism story to explain the presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' ministry. Nevertheless, the baptismal account is preserved in Mt. 3:1-17. The author of Luke separates Jesus' baptism from the descent of the Spirit and the heavenly voice, preferring to introduce these later when Jesus is praying (Lk. 3:21-22). The author of John chooses to replicate the baptismal story, but he is clearly embarrassed by it since he turns it into a vision by John the Baptist (Jn. 1:32).

Various attempts have been made to account for the appearance of the Spirit as a dove (ὥς περιστερά) in all four Gospels.²⁴ One particularly persuasive explanation is that the Gospel authors are conforming the physical embodiment of God's Spirit to the popular conception of spirits, or souls, as airy, bird-like entities. James Frazer observes that it was

²³ For a concise summary of both heresies, see Arland J. Hultgren and Steven A. Haggmark (eds.) *The Earliest Christian Heretics: Readings from their Opponents* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), for Ebionism see pp. 116-122 and Cerinthianism see pp. 34-36. Cerinthianism is particularly similar to Davies' theory since the Cerinthians believed that Jesus had two personas within himself; one divine and one human.

²⁴ For a summary of these arguments, see Stephen Gero, 'The Spirit as a Dove at the Baptism of Jesus', *NovT* 18 (1976) pp. 17-35.

widely accepted in the ancient world that when a person died his soul would leave his body in bird shape and he adds that 'this conception has probably left traces in most languages, and it lingers as a metaphor in poetry.'²⁵ In concurrence with Frazer's comments, the depiction of the spirit or soul of the deceased as a bird is common in biblical, classical and modern literature. For example, James L. Allen Jr. writes in his study of the bird-soul motif in the writings of William Butler Yeats:

'Because of its ability to rise above the earth a bird is a fairly obvious and appropriate symbol for a disembodied soul. The identification of soul with bird is...both ancient and widespread, the naturalness of such an association no doubt underlying its universality.'²⁶

Daniel Ogden alludes to various passages from classical literature in which the soul leaves the body in the form of a bird²⁷ and one example of the early Christian use of this imagery is found in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in which the saint's soul leaves his body in the form of a dove upon death.

'So at length the lawless men, seeing that his body could not be consumed by the fire, ordered an executioner to go up to him and stab him with a dagger. And when he had done this, there came forth [a dove and] a quantity of blood.'²⁸

²⁵ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Chapter III. 33-34.

²⁶ James L. Allen, Jr., 'Yeats's Bird-Soul Symbolism', *TCL* 6. 3 (1960) p. 117.

²⁷ 'Sophocles speaks of the soul leaving the body as a 'fair-winger bird.'...when Aristaeus of Proconessus's soul temporarily detached itself from his body and flew out of his mouth, it was in the form of a crow. The soul-bird, hovering over or perching on the body of a dead man, is common in archaic and classical art' (Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) p. 223).

²⁸ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 16:1 (trans. J.B. Lightfoot). There is some disagreement concerning the mention of a dove here. For example, Eusebius does not mention the dove and many have thought that the text has been altered. Cf. also the martyrdom of St. Eulalia in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* in which it is reported that a white dove left her mouth upon death.

Although it is possible that the Gospel authors adopted the simple literary device of a bird-soul as a means by which to represent the physical embodiment of the Spirit, other scholars have suggested that περιστερὰ is an error in translation and that the word relates to the manner in which the Spirit descends. For example, E. A. Abbott observes the similarities between the terms דּוֹלָה ('dove') and יָנֵס ('will rest') with particular reference to Isaiah 11:2: 'the Spirit of Yahweh will rest (יָנֵס) upon him'.²⁹ Stephen Gero substantiates this theory by indicating that 'the Hebrew דּוֹלָה 'oppressor' in Zeph. 3:1 is interpreted in several Greek versions and the Vulgate as 'dove'.³⁰

Regardless of whether the Gospel authors intended περιστερὰ to indicate a physical dove or simply the Spirit's mode of descent, a theory of spirit-possession would be greatly strengthened if the Gospel writers intended to portray this Spirit as entering 'into' Jesus following its descent, rather than simply resting 'upon' him. The connection between possession and the presence of a spirit *within* the individual is demonstrated in the Markan account of the Capernaum demoniac when the unclean spirit is said to be in (ἐν) the possessed man (Mk. 1:23). Certainly this in-dwelling nature of the Holy Spirit is suggested in the baptismal account provided in the Ebionite Gospel in which the dove comes down and enters *into* Jesus (περιστερᾶς κατελθούσης καὶ εἰσελθούσης εἰς αὐτόν).³¹ However, I would suggest that the terminology used by the Gospel authors cannot be used as a reliable indicator of spirit-possession since the terms 'upon' and 'in' are used interchangeably when depicting the reception of the Spirit in the Old Testament. For

²⁹ E. A. Abbott, *From Letter to Spirit* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1903) p. 115.

³⁰ S. Gero, 'The Spirit as a Dove at the Baptism of Jesus', *NovT* 18 (1976) p. 22, n. 8.

³¹ Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.* 30. 13.

example, Isa. 42:1 reads 'I have put my Spirit upon him' (נָתַתִּי רוּחִי עָלָיו) whereas Ezek. 36:27 reads 'and I will put my Spirit within you' (וְנָתַתִּי רוּחִי אֵינָם).

Since Jesus' wilderness experience follows directly from his baptism in all three Synoptic Gospels, it is clear that the evangelists intend the two events to be linked together.³² With this in mind, Stevan Davies suggests that Jesus' expulsion into the wilderness is the direct result of his prior gift of the Spirit at baptism and that the forceful nature of Jesus' departure is reminiscent of the impulsive behaviour associated with the possessed. Therefore Davies proposes that the Gospel authors are describing a 'spontaneous possession experience'.³³ The forcefulness of Jesus' expulsion is evident in the terminology used in the Markan account. While Matthew and Luke employ the much softer ἀνήχθη / ἤγετο ('led', Mt. 4:1; Lk. 4:1), a forceful, almost violent, external influence upon Jesus is evident in Mk. 1:12, in which the Spirit forcefully 'drives out' (ἐκβάλλει) Jesus into the wilderness.³⁴

³² Ulrich Mauser writes: 'the close connection between the baptism and the wilderness story indicates that we are to regard Jesus' expulsion into the desert as the necessary outcome of his baptism' (Ulrich Mauser, 'Christ in the Wilderness: the Wilderness Theme in the Second Gospel and its Basis in the Biblical Tradition', *SBT* 39 (London: SCM Press, 1963) p. 98). Similarly, C. K. Barrett comments: 'the temptations of Jesus have often been explained as due to the natural mental reaction to the events of the preceding narrative of the baptism' (C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1977) p. 47).

³³ Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 64.

³⁴ The term ἐκβάλλει is typically used by the author of Mark in connection with the exorcism of demons, cf. Mk. 1:34, 39, 43; 3:15, 22; 4:13; 7:26; 9:18, 28.

Problems with the spirit-possession theory

There are a number of difficulties that arise when applying a spirit-possession model to the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit as presented by the Gospel authors. First, if the reader of the Gospels is to understand that Jesus was healing, exorcising and teaching while in a possessed state, then we would naturally expect to encounter evidence within the Gospels of the abnormal behaviour that is typically associated with possessed individuals, such as fits, convulsions and seizures. As reports of this type of behaviour are noticeably absent we may reasonably conclude that Jesus did not exhibit these symptoms, although Davies' suggestion that the evangelists would have edited out such potentially damaging material is equally as credible.³⁵

Second, when considering models of possession, particularly possession by a *divine spirit*, we must not automatically assume that the individual is passive during its manifestation and we cannot discount the possibility that the individual actively sought to attain a state of divine possession. Many magico-religious individuals within various cultures have claimed, and still claim, to experience divine possession, however this state is most often deliberately induced through ritual or trance by individuals seeking a close immediacy with a deity for various purposes, from inspired prophecy to magical activity. For example, Oesterreich comments that 'states of divine possession are generally of a

³⁵ Davies, *Jesus the Healer* p. 102. In addition, note that the term δαιμονίζομαι, ('to be possessed by a demon', (Foester, 'δαίμων, δαιμόνιον', *TDNT* 2, p. 19)) which is usually used for those possessed by demons, is never used for Jesus in the New Testament.

voluntary nature, or at least desired'³⁶ and William Sargant points out in his study of possession and mysticism:

‘possession has also very often been deliberately induced, to give a human being the most direct and immediate possible experience of a deity, by becoming its living vessel, and to enable him to act as a channel of communication between gods and spirits and their worshippers on earth.’³⁷

Third, there are many other psychological disorders which imitate the symptoms of possession but clearly do not involve the presence of an external, supernatural being. For example, sudden and irrational changes in personality and the notion of a new persona acting in a manner disconnected from the consciousness of the original persona are both behaviours that are typical of the psychological disorder known as ‘dissociation’, a common psychological device that is adopted by an individual in order to deal with anxiety or traumatic situations. When an individual employs a series of alternate personas as a coping mechanism and each of these persona begin to function as an individual persona within themselves, then this normally triggers the condition known as Multiple Personality Disorder.³⁸

A fourth difficulty when applying Davies’ spirit-possession theory is that the Gospel passages cited by Davies as examples of possession behaviour, namely the odd behaviour

³⁶ Oesterreich, *Possession: Demonical and Other*, p. 157.

³⁷ William Sargant, *The Mind Possessed: A Physiology of Possession, Mysticism and Faith Healing* (London: Heinemann, 1973) p. 44.

³⁸ Cf. Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 86-89. For the treatment of multiple personality disorder in modern psychology, see Hans Naegeli-Osjord, *Possession & Exorcism: Understanding the Human Psyche in Turmoil*, trans. Sigrid & David Coates (Oregon: New Frontiers, 1988) p. 135f.

in Mk. 3:21 and the teaching on alter-persona speech in Mk. 13:11, are also observations made of magicians in antiquity who have possession of a spirit or are able to manipulate spiritual powers. Although Morton Smith agrees that 'he is beside himself' (ὅτι ἐξέστη, Mk. 3:21) suggests a form of abnormal behaviour, he also draws close attention to the link between 'magic' and 'mania' that was made during and in the centuries following Jesus' lifetime and adds:

'Magicians who want to make demons obey often scream their spells, gesticulate, and match the mad in fury.'³⁹

In support of the maniacal behaviour of the magician, Marcel Mauss mentions:

'violent gestures, a shrill voice...are taken often taken to be attributes of magicians. They are all signs betraying a kind of nervous condition, which in many societies may be cultivated by magicians.'⁴⁰

Interpreting Mk. 3:21 as indicative of abnormal behaviour is a reasonable assumption, however the implication that the crowd had carried out an in-depth psychological analysis of Jesus and arrived at the conclusion that his persona was absent or displaced is a little more difficult to comprehend. Furthermore, the terminology used in Mk. 3:21 is present in other Gospel passages which are clearly devoid of any connotations of possession. For example, in response to Jesus' exorcism in Mt. 12.23 the author of Matthew writes that the crowds were 'amazed' (ἐξίσταντο). John Christopher Thomas interprets the Greek

³⁹ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978) p. 32. Smith later adds: 'in the centuries following Jesus' lifetime magic continued to be closely associated with madness' (p. 77).

⁴⁰ M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) p. 27.

term ἐξίστημι as conveying 'the idea of an extraordinary state which can be described as being out of one's mind' and he suggests that in this passage the crowds 'are literally 'out of their minds' over what Jesus has done.'⁴¹ Are we to understand that the crowd are also spirit-possessed in this instance? It is more probable that use of this term in this instance is simply intended to portray a sense of wonder and amazement.⁴² Furthermore, L. Maurizio shows that a subject who does 'not quite seem to be one's self' is a observation generally made of individuals undergoing periods of induced trance or ecstasy, however 'it does not indicate that the soul has left the body...but that the person has abandoned his usual ways.'⁴³

In addition to the difficulties encountered when establishing symptoms of physical possession in Jesus' behaviour, an alteration in speech does not inevitably indicate *passive* possession since it was explicitly linked in antiquity with the practice of magic and the manipulation of prophetic spirits. For example, the possession of a spirit that alters the voice of the magician is mentioned in Isaiah 29:4:

'Then deep from the earth you shall speak,
from low in the dust your words shall come;
your voice shall be as one that has a familiar spirit out of the ground
and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.'

⁴¹ John Christopher Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought*, JPT 13 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) p. 179.

⁴² Particularly since ἐξίστημι is often used by the Gospel writers to express a sense of wonderment upon witnessing a miracle (see Mk. 2:12, 5:42, 6:51; Mt. 12:23; Lk. 8:56).

⁴³ L. Maurizio, 'Anthropology and Spirit Possession: A Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi', *JHS* 115 (1995) p. 76.

The translation of אֹב ('ob') within this passage as 'one that has a familiar spirit' (the version given by the KJV) describes the common technique that was used by magicians in the ancient world to command spirits to enter into their bodies in a form of 'controlled possession'. It is not clear, however, whether the term אֹב was generally used to refer to the magician or the spirit itself. The *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* translates אֹב as 'skin-bottle', an interpretation which embraces the notion that the magician was the vessel for the spirit and/or that the voice of the spirit was deep and guttural and seemed to come from the abdomen or the 'armpit'. In the classical period these magicians were called *ventriloquists* or *engastrimuthoi* ('belly-talkers') as the deep guttural voices appeared to come from deep in their stomachs.⁴⁴ Similarly the Latin *pytho* was applied to the spirit possessing the magician in the Greek mystery cults, hence the phenomena was typically described as having 'pytho in your belly.'⁴⁵

Morton Smith suggests, with particular reference to the witch of Endor in I. Sam. 28:7, that אֹב refers to the spirits themselves and hence 'the man possessed is known as "one who has an 'ob"' (I Sam. 28:7), more specifically, "one who has in him an 'obot'".⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Daniel Ogden notes 'the early Hellenistic Septuagint several times uses *engastrimuthos* to translate the Hebrew term *ob*' (D. Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. 113, for more on the terms *engastrimutos* and *ventriloquism* see pp. 112 - 114). In addition, Dodds comments that 'belly-talkers' are mediums who appear to have a second 'daemonic' voice that comes from their bellies (see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951) p. 71 and E. R. Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) p. 199).

⁴⁵ See L. Maurizio, 'Anthropology and Spirit Possession: A Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi' *JHS* 115 (1995) pp. 69-86.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 78. Smith adds that a 'belief in 'obot or similar powers seems to have lived on in Palestine to at least the third century A.D' (p. 78).

Smith elaborates on the origin of these 'obot' as follows:

'The 'obot (plural of 'ob) are a mysterious class of beings, commonly said to be 'spirits of the dead,' but probably some sort of underworld deities. Although they are in the realm of the dead, and speak from the earth in whispering voices (Isaiah 8.19; 29.4)' ⁴⁷

Alternatively, Christophe Nihan proposes in his study of 1 Samuel 28 that the term אוב is used in the Old Testament to refer to the practice of necromancy and although it can be applied to the magician it can also signify the spirit itself, since the Arabic 'abā' means 'to return' and the spirit is thought to 'return' to the earth. ⁴⁸ Nihan concludes that the use of the word אוב can be explained by paying particular attention to the Hebrew term 'father', therefore the term 'would refer specifically to a dead ancestor' who could be consulted through necromancy. ⁴⁹

Since evidence found within the Old Testament reveals that the possession of a familiar spirit often had a direct effect upon the speech of the magician, we must rule out the immediate assumption that a change in speech is a clear indicator of passive possession. On the contrary, an alteration in speech may well indicate that the individual has actively engaged in magical spirit manipulation and he is subsequently in possession of a familiar spirit (we will come to examine the possession of familiar spirits below on pg. 193).

⁴⁷ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 78.

⁴⁸ Christophe L. Nihan, '1 Samuel 28 and the Condemnation of Necromancy in Persian Yehud' in Todd Klutz (ed.) *Magic in the Biblical world: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, JSNTsupp 245 (2003) p. 29.

⁴⁹ Christophe L. Nihan, '1 Samuel 28 and the Condemnation of Necromancy in Persian Yehud', p. 31.

A further question which must be raised when considering Davies' 'possessed-healer' analogy is one of Jesus' own awareness of his possessed state. T. K. Oesterreich draws a clear distinction between a form of lucid possession, in which self-awareness is maintained throughout the possession experience, and hypnotic or somnambulistic possession, in which the individual loses awareness of himself and is left with no memory of the events that took place while in the possession trance.⁵⁰ Davies implies that his model of spirit-possession belongs to the latter option, stating:

'it is not uncommon for possessed people to be amnesiac to a greater or lesser degree regarding their exploits while possessed, because their normal memory-forming ego was absent during the time of the experience.'⁵¹

If the miracles of the Gospels were performed while Jesus was in a somnambulistic state, then we would expect to encounter many instances of disorientation or confusion immediately following the miracles or even indications that Jesus was unaware that he had performed a miracle. Again, there is the likely possibility that the evangelists would have omitted any reports of amnesiac behaviour. However, the Gospels authors not only fail to record any amnesiac and disorientated behaviour in their accounts of Jesus' life, but they promote a strong theme which is completely to the contrary – that Jesus demonstrated great authority and control over his powers. As we shall examine in greater

⁵⁰ T. K. Oesterreich describes somnambulism as a state 'in which the normal individual is temporarily replaced by another and which leaves no memory on return to the normal' (T. K. Oesterreich, *Possession*, p. 39). Similarly, Erika Bourguignon discovered that possessed individuals who use trance usually suffer from amnesia following their ASC experience (Erika Bourguignon, *Possession* (San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp, 1976).

⁵¹ Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 34. In addition, Davies quotes Michael Lambek: 'Hosts by and large do not remember what occurred while they were in a trance' (p. 35, quoting from Michael Lambek, 'From Disease to Discourse', in Colleen Ward, *Altered States of Consciousness and Mental Health: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989) p. 40).

depth below, the Gospel authors include numerous comments from both Jesus' opponents and followers regarding his ἐξουσία ('authority') in the application of his powers and they assert that he is entirely capable of transferring this power to his disciples (Mk. 6:7-13//Mt. 10:1//Lk. 9:1). Either this emphasis on Jesus' autonomy in the application of his powers was invented by the evangelists in order to invalidate any rumours of spirit-possession or these are authentic observations of the relationship between the Historical Jesus and the power-source by which he performed his miracles. Either way, by presenting Jesus in an autonomous and dominant role in respect to his miracle-working δύναμις, the Gospel writers contradict the theory that Jesus was occasionally in an amnesiac, behaviourally unstable and psychologically passive state of spirit-possession.

i. Observations of Jesus' ἐξουσία in the Gospels

Since demon-possessed individuals and spirit-inspired prophets were an everyday encounter in the ancient world, a first century audience would presumably have been accustomed to recognising the symptoms of possession. Therefore, if Jesus was exhibiting typical possession-like behaviour then we would expect to encounter some allegations made by observers, in the polemical materials at least, that he was possessed. But this is not the case. When the Gospel authors include a response from the crowds immediately following a healing or exorcism, the crowds do not comment on Jesus' possession behaviour, but instead on the noticeable degree of ἐξουσία that he holds over his powers. For example, those who witness the exorcism of the Capernaum demoniac immediately respond by questioning the authority behind the exorcism ('what is this? A

new teaching! With authority (ἐξουσία) he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him', Mk. 1:27//Lk. 4:36). Jesus' autonomy in the application of his powers is so prominent on certain occasions that the people begin to fear (Mk. 9:14-16) and question the source of his personal power ('by what authority are you doing these things?', Mk. 11:28//Mt. 21:23//Lk. 20:2). The pervasive nature of this ἐξουσία in all three Synoptic Gospels is summarised by Samuel Dickey, who begins his study of Jesus' conception of authority by stating:

'Few things about Jesus are more striking or unquestionable than his sense of authority...nor was this sense of authority merely subjective. He gave to others also the impression of a unique possession of it.'⁵²

Furthermore, since the common definition of the Greek word ἐξουσία is 'freedom of choice, right to act or decide'⁵³, the presence of this term in the Gospels by its very definition starkly contradicts the passive state that is central to Davies' model of spirit-possession.

ii.. The transmission of δύναμις to the disciples (Mk. 6:7-13//Mt. 10:1//Lk. 9:1; 10:17))

In all three Synoptic Gospels, Jesus grants a select group of his disciples the ἐξουσία to cast out demons, heal the sick and raise the dead (Mk. 6:7-13//Mt. 10:1//Lk. 9:1).⁵⁴ By

⁵² Samuel Dickey, 'The significance of the Baptism of Jesus for his conception of authority', *The Biblical World* 37. 6 (1911) p. 359.

⁵³ W. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) p. 277 - 278.

⁵⁴ Barrett suggests that this is 'the same ἐξουσία, presumably, as that which Jesus had' (C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1977) p. 128).

revealing that Jesus is able to teach his techniques of healing and exorcism to others and having those who have acquire these skills claim great success in their endeavours (cf. Lk. 10:17), the Gospel authors suggest that this power source cannot be exclusive to Jesus and therefore the capability to perform miracles is not the result of a spiritual entity that has possessed him alone. Furthermore, since all three Synoptic authors imply that both Jesus and the disciples are capable of summoning these miraculous powers *at will* whenever a healing or exorcism is required, this clearly contradicts the typical model of possession in which the possessing spirit dictates precisely at what time and to whom a possession seizure will manifest itself. Further questions regarding the exclusivity of this miracle-working power are raised in the account of Simon Magus, who attempts to buy the power of the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:14-24, and Jesus implies that the Jewish exorcists share in the same source of power to exorcise demons in Mt. 12:27//Lk. 11:19.⁵⁵ If we are to understand that Jesus' miraculous powers were only effective when he was subjected to bouts of possession by the Holy Spirit, is the reader to understand that the Jewish exorcists were also spirit-possessed when they engaged in their miracle-working activities?

Although precise details explaining how these powers are taught to the disciples are not provided by the authors of the Synoptics, John's Gospel reveals that in one instance Jesus *breathes* the Holy Spirit into the disciples (Jn. 20:22). Although John Hull indicates that

⁵⁵ Graham Twelftree states that in view of Matthew 12 'Jesus' source of power-authority may not have been as unique as it has been claimed' (G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) p. 109).

Jesus breathes on the eyes of the disciples in the *Pistis Sophia*⁵⁶, I would not consider this passage to be comparable with the incident in Jn. 20:22, since by breathing into the eyes of the disciples in the *Pistis Sophia* Jesus intends to grant them a vision and not to imbue them with any spiritual power. Alternatively, Morton Smith proposes that the reader should understand the transmission of power to the disciples in Jn. 20:22 as the possession of the disciples by the spirit of Jesus while he is still alive:

‘when they are possessed by his spirit he is in them and acts through them; the proof of this is their ability to perform miracles like his.’⁵⁷

By interpreting the act of breathing as the transference of spiritual power, Smith is appealing to the ancient Hebrew correlation between the soul and the breath of the body.⁵⁸ For instance, William Ross Schoemaker demonstrates that the early Hebrews made a close association between spirit and breath (or wind) since both were considered to be forms of invisible energy.⁵⁹ Consequently, gods are often portrayed in religious and literary texts as breathing power, or spirit, into man and, in a similar fashion, blowing upon objects or people in the ancient world was considered to imbue the object with an

⁵⁶ *Pistis Sophia*, 141. Hull points out that ‘the eyes form an entry for the power’ (Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p. 112).

⁵⁷ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 115.

⁵⁸ The BDB reflects this association by translating רִיחַ as ‘breath, wind, spirit’ (pp. 924-926).

⁵⁹ William Ross Schoemaker explains that in the Old Testament literature dating approximately from 900 to 700 BC, רִיחַ has the meaning of both wind and spirit, although the connection between רִיחַ and breath is not made until the exilic period (550-400 BC) (William Ross Schoemaker, ‘The use of רִיחַ in the Old Testament, and πνεῦμα in the New Testament: A Lexicographical Study’, *JBL* 23. 1 (1904) p. 13f). For more on the Old Testament meaning of רִיחַ as both ‘spirit’ and ‘wind/breath’, see M. V. Van Pelt, W. C. Kaiser Jr. and D. I. Block, רִיחַ, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 3, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997) pp. 1073-1078.

element of the bearer's spirit or power.⁶⁰ In observing the widespread nature of this type of behaviour, the Renaissance writer Henry Cornelius Agrippa comments:

‘magicians enchanting things, are wont to blow, and breathe upon them the words of the verse, or breathe in the virtue with the spirit, that so the whole virtue of the soul be directed to the thing enchanted.’⁶¹

In his annotations on Agrippa's text, Donald Tyson adds: ‘this is why gamblers blow on dice for luck, and why shamans chant over the sick in such a way that their breath touches the patient.’⁶² In accordance with this principle, Celsus recounts that the Egyptian magicians are able to ‘blow away diseases’⁶³ and Graham Twelftree suggests that Celsus' observations are to be understood as a method of exorcism.⁶⁴ The blowing out of air was also an integral part of Hellenistic magical ritual and, as we have discovered in the previous chapter, breathing techniques and the blowing out of air are common features of the rituals in the Greek Magical Papyri.⁶⁵

By implying that Jesus' ability to heal and exorcise was a specific technique that could be taught to others and that the bearer had complete autonomy in the application of this miracle-working power, the Gospel authors clearly contradict a theory of passive

⁶⁰ Maurizio observes that the breathing of winds, or specifically mantic winds (πνεύματα μαντικά), are typically associated with the gods (L. Maurizio, ‘Anthropology and Spirit Possession: A Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi’, *JHS* 115 (1995) p. 76).

⁶¹ Agrippa, H. Cornelius, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, (l. LXXI) (trans. James Freake, ed. Donald Tyson (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1997) p. 217).

⁶² Agrippa, H. Cornelius, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. James Freake, ed. Donald Tyson (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1997) p. 217.

⁶³ Origen, *Con. Cels.* I. 68.

⁶⁴ G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 28.

⁶⁵ For example, PGM IV. 3007-86 instructs the magician: ‘while conjuring, blow once, blowing air from the tips of the feet up to the face’.

possession in which it is typically the possessing-spirit that decides to whom and at what time a possession episode will occur. Therefore, as John Hull suggests, rather than fulfilling the role a 'spirit-possessed healer', Jesus appears throughout the Gospels as 'the model of a supreme magician passing on power to his initiates.'⁶⁶

iii. The temptation narrative as a demonstration of power-autonomy

While some scholars have ruled out the influence of the Holy Spirit within the temptation narratives and indicated that there is no evidence to suggest that the Spirit assists Jesus in resisting the Devil's temptations⁶⁷, others, such as C.K. Barrett, maintain that Jesus remains under the influence of the Spirit throughout the temptations.⁶⁸ I would suggest that although the forceful nature of Jesus' expulsion into the wilderness does appear to support a theory of possession, if the intentions of the Gospel writers had been to portray Jesus as remaining in a state of spirit-possession while in the wilderness then the subsequent inclusion of the anti-magical apologetic material, i.e. the temptation narratives of Matthew and Luke (Mt. 4:1-11//Lk. 4:1-13), is entirely illogical.

⁶⁶ J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, (SBT, 2nd Series 28; London: SCM, 1974) p. 2.

⁶⁷ For example, Ernest Best comments: 'it is never said that Jesus was helped by the Spirit in the defeat of Satan' (Ernest Best, *The Temptation and The Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (SNTSMS 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) p. 14).

⁶⁸ Since Jesus is under the influence of the Spirit when driven into the wilderness in the Lukan version (Lk. 4:1, πλήρης πνεύματος, 'full of the Holy Spirit'), Barrett therefore concludes: 'in all three Gospels Jesus at the time of the Temptation is under the influence of the Spirit....Jesus faces his opponent fully and manifestly equipped with divine power' (C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, p. 49).

If we are defining ‘possession’ as a state in which the normal persona is temporarily suspended and a new persona becomes dominant, then it must follow that during a possession episode the possessed individual is no longer an autonomous person with a mind free to make decisions for him or herself, but instead an instrument under the control of this foreign, external possessing power. Consequently, if the Gospel authors intended the reader to understand that Jesus was spirit-possessed during this period of temptation, then they must have overlooked the fact that the dialogue would not be between the Devil and the person of Jesus, but between the Devil and the new possessing power, the Spirit of God. If we are to believe, in the words of C. F. Evans, that “‘to tempt’ here...is not to entice to sin in the ordinary sense, but to test the godly for his fidelity to God”,⁶⁹ then the temptation narrative would paint the bizarre picture of a spirit, deriving ultimately from God, being tested in its faithfulness to God. On the contrary, Matthew and Luke affirm that the Devil appeals directly to Jesus’ *own human weaknesses* by tempting him to use his powers for self-gratification (‘command this stone to become bread’, Mt. 4:3//Lk. 4:3), to further his own authority and self-importance (Mt. 4:8//Lk. 4:5) and to frivolously test the potency of his powers (‘throw yourself down’, Mt. 4:6//Lk. 4:9). By having the Devil attempt to exploit Jesus’ human weaknesses, the authors of Matthew and Luke suggest that Jesus personally determines how his powers are employed and he is able, if he wishes, to swap allegiances, relinquish his power or use his powers to evil or self-gratifying ends. This implication that Jesus has absolute autonomy in the application of his powers clearly invalidates the theory that he is subject to passive divine-possession throughout the Matthean and Lukan temptation narratives.

⁶⁹ C. F. Evans, *St. Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990) p. 255.

iv. The healing of the centurion's servant (Mt. 8:5-13//Lk 7:1-10//Jn. 4:48-54)

The healing of the centurion's servant (Mt. 8:5-11//Lk. 7:1-10) is repeatedly studied for its teachings concerning faith, humility and the inclusion of the Gentiles. However it also harbours a significant passage regarding Jesus' authority over the application of his powers and even hints that a spirit, or even multiple spirits, may be under Jesus' control. Since this healing takes place at a distance and at the precise moment when Jesus gives the healing word (a fact emphasised by the author of John in Jn. 4:51-53), the Gospel writers must have been aware that this method of healing was highly unusual and yet they do not adequately explain how it was supposedly achieved. Is the reader to understand that Jesus performed a telepathic healing?⁷⁰ Or did a whispered prayer to God take place at some point during Jesus' discourse with the centurion?

Cures from a distance are reported of other healers in antiquity. For example, Morton Smith remarks that the Indian sages were able to exorcise at a long distance⁷¹ and the Talmud contains an account in which Hanina ben Dosa heals a boy through prayer while at a distance from him.⁷² A closer examination of distance healing reveals that this type of healing is commonly achieved through three methods; a) by imploring God or employing spirits to carry out the healing on the healer's behalf, b) through a form of sympathetic

⁷⁰ This idea is dismissed by Bultmann who states that 'hardly anybody will support the historicity of a telepathic healing' (R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) p. 39). However Twelftree counters that 'we cannot dismiss a story because the method of healing is not to the liking of the twentieth or twenty-first century' (Graham H Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999) p. 296).

⁷¹ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 107.

⁷² See b. Ber. 34b.

magic in which healing 'effluvia' leaves the body of the healer and travels to the location of the sick individual⁷³, or c) as a result of the healer 'splitting' himself into two parts and sending his spiritual half to perform the healing.

The ability to divide the self is a technique laid claim to by many magicians and shamans throughout history. Pythagoras, for one, was reportedly seen in two cities at the same time on the same day and Daniel Ogden points out that the Greek shamans were capable of detaching their souls from their physical bodies and sending them to various places at a distance to the body, a process known as 'bilocating'.⁷⁴ Marcel Mauss explains that this 'bilocation' procedure was thought to be how medieval magicians were able to attend the Sabbath by leaving behind a *vicarium daemonem* as a replacement for their real self⁷⁵ and he elaborates further regarding the popular belief in the projection of the magician's soul:

'A soul is a person's double, that is, it is not an anonymous part of his person, but the person himself. It is transported at will to any place and its activities there are physical ones. In some cases the magician is said to split himself in two.'⁷⁶

Although 'bilocating' was a common magical practice in antiquity, if we look more deeply into the narrative of Mt. 8:5-13/Lk. 7:1-10 we discover that the central focus of

⁷³ Mauss comments: 'sympathetic (or mimetic) actions performed at a distance are not always thought to be working on their own. There is an idea of effluvia which leave the body, magical images which travel about, lines linking the magician and his field of action, ropes, chains' (M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) p. 72).

⁷⁴ Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 9.

⁷⁵ Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, p. 35.

⁷⁶ Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, pp. 34-35.

the story is not concerned with the innate powers of Jesus himself, but on his commanding authority over subordinates that will carry out the healing on his behalf.

The centurion's words reveal that his confidence in Jesus' healing power derives from Jesus' ability to control spirits. The centurion is an official who holds a position of authority and he is accustomed to giving orders to soldiers under him who will immediately carry out his requests. He compares Jesus' position to his own by saying καὶ γὰρ ('for also') Jesus has a military-like authority over others that are under his control.⁷⁷ Since the centurion knows from personal experience that a word of command can produce results, he urges Jesus that it is not necessary for him to attend the bedside of his servant as others will carry out the healing if he 'only says the word' (μόνον εἰπὲ λόγῳ, Mt. 8:8//Lk. 7:7).⁷⁸ The centurion thereby reveals two personal convictions about Jesus' power; 1) that Jesus has a military-like authority over his powers, and 2) that Jesus has unknown powers that appear to be at his disposal to carry out healings on his command. The centurion's observation that Jesus shares a similar military role is echoed in Jesus' behaviour elsewhere in the Gospels; for example, he often acts like a commanding general, ordering demons out of the possessed with 'authority'.⁷⁹ The author of Luke's constant use of παρηγγεῖλεν ('charge' or 'command') in particular supports this idea and

⁷⁷ It is interesting to note that the RSV omits the καί ('also') in both versions (Mt. 8:9//Lk 7:8), although it is retained in the KJV version of Luke's account.

⁷⁸ Twelftree observes that the author of Matthew adds the word 'only' (μόνος) to accentuate the centurion's confidence in Jesus' authority (Graham H Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999) p. 109).

⁷⁹ Cf. Jesus' *exousia* in Mk. 1.27//Lk. 4.36 ('What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him') and the question in Mk. 11.28//Mt. 21:23//Lk. 20:2 'by what authority are you doing these things?'.

Graham Twelftree comments that 'the word has strong military associations, and its basic meaning has to do with passing an announcement along the ranks of command.'⁸⁰

Ultimately, Jesus' positive response implies that the centurion is correct in his observation. He is not rebuked for making such a forthright statement about Jesus' power source, as is the case in the Beelzebul controversy (Mk. 3:22-30//Mt. 12:24-32//Lk. 11:15-23), but he is commended on his faith and he is rewarded as the healing taking place 'at that hour' (Mt. 8:13). Both Gospels also include a rare occurrence of emotion on Jesus' behalf ('he marvelled', Mt. 8:10//Lk. 7:9). The inclusion of Jesus' emotional response and the general style of the dialogue between Jesus and the centurion suggests to some scholars that this is an authentic account of an observer's insight into how Jesus was able to heal the sick.⁸¹

An effort to play down the importance of Jesus' own authority in favour of emphasising the prevailing authority of God over Jesus has been made by the redactors in their interpretation of the centurion's self-referential credentials in Mt. 8:9//Lk. 7:8: 'For I am a man under authority.' The Syriac versions suggest that in the original Aramaic the

⁸⁰ Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999) p. 156, cf. Lk 5:14, 8:29, 56, 9:21, Acts 1:4, 4:18, 5:28, 40, 10:42, 15:5, 16:18, 23, 17:30, 23:22, 30.

⁸¹ Cf. James Dunn: 'the Aramaic character of the centurion's words, the unusual ascription of amazement to Jesus, and the apophthegmatic nature of the dialogue (in the context of a miracle story) all point to a setting in the life of Jesus.' (J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: a Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975) p. 77).

centurion's statement was 'I am also a man *having* authority' (my emphasis)⁸² and some commentators suggest that the change to 'I am a man under authority' is a deliberate alteration of the text.⁸³

By having the centurion state that he acts *under* authority, the comparison is made between the centurion who acts *under* the authority of Antipas and Jesus who acts *under* the authority of God and therefore the whole issue of Jesus' own authority is conveniently avoided. However, the inclusion of messengers in the Lukan account of the healing may have been an embellishment on the concept of the centurion *having* authority. The author of Luke has the centurion actively demonstrate his authority by 'sending' (ἀπέστειλεν) two sets of messengers to Jesus. If the statements concerning 'authority' and 'command' were to come from the mouths of the messengers themselves, then this would further strengthen the centurion's claim that he was a man *having* authority with subordinates willing to carry out his orders. Gerd Theissen agrees that the author of Luke has introduced a motif of messengers to the story, although he admits that the author of Matthew has a tendency to omit lesser characters.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, I would be

⁸² In a footnote to this passage, Joachim Jeremias writes: 'The Syriac versions show that the centurion's words only envisage his own possession of authority (syr^{sin} Matt. 8.9 'for I also am a man *האית לי שולטנא having authority*, and soldiers are under my hand'; syr^{pal} Matt. 8.9 'for I also am a man *ואית תחות שולטנותי רומיין and have those who are subject to my authority*')...In Aramaic the text would have run *ܒܫܘܠܬܢܐ = ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ* (cf. Luke 4.36) = 'having authority'; the translator understood the words to mean 'under authority', i.e. 'having superiors over me', and rendered them by *ܐܬ ܕܝܚܘܨܐܢ.*' (Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM, 1958) p. 30, n. 4).

⁸³ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, p. 77. Evans argues: 'that the point of comparison is with Jesus as one who acts under the authority of God is forced' (C. F. Evans, *St. Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990) p. 345).

⁸⁴ Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, trans. F. McDonagh, ed. J. Riches (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983) p. 182.

inclined to agree with Marshall's suggestion that the Matthean version appears to be more natural:

'the centurion's speech to Jesus sounds better on his own lips than if it were committed to memory by the messengers and Jesus' praise of him would be more reasonable if he were present.'⁸⁵

Even if we permit the interpretation 'under authority' to stand in Mt. 8:9//Lk. 7:8, the subsequent statement 'with soldiers under me' in both accounts suggests that the centurion is comparing his own subordinate soldiers to the presence of equally obedient minions over which Jesus has authority. The identity of these 'subordinates' is considerably difficult to explain given that Jesus does not elaborate on the centurion's comment but simply marvels (ἐθαύμασεν) at his faith (Mt. 8:10//Lk. 7:9). Consequently, the reader is not enlightened on the identity of these beings and the mysterious comparison remains as follows:

Antipas	God
↓	↓
Centurion	Jesus
↓	↓
Soldiers	?????

⁸⁵ I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978) p. 278.

The identity of these subordinate beings has not been satisfactorily explained. Many commentators ignore their existence in the passage or simply refer to them as 'others.'⁸⁶ Jos Keulers proposes that these 'others' are the diseases themselves that obey Jesus⁸⁷ and H. Van der Loos suggests that the centurion is alluding to demonic 'powers which afflict mankind with disease'.⁸⁸ Fenton argues that the centurion is speaking of the 'work of his disciples', however as no spoken commands to the disciples are recorded by the Gospel writers, the instantaneous cure would be dependent upon the ironic coincidence that the disciples were healing the slave at the exact time when the centurion encountered Jesus.⁸⁹ Alternatively, considering Jesus' ability to exercise control over demons⁹⁰, it is highly likely that the centurion is referring to spiritual beings under Jesus' authority.⁹¹ More specifically, since the pericope plays upon the concepts of *willing* servants, a fact emphasised by Luke who has the centurion send messengers to Jesus, then this would suggest that the spiritual beings present in this passage are not compelled demons, but willing spirits. Some commentators have taken the bold step into the spiritual world by recognising spiritual powers at Jesus' disposal. For example, Plummer suggests that the

⁸⁶ For example, Marshall writes: 'The centurion...can use his delegated authority to give orders that others must obey; so Jesus being under the authority of God can give orders to others' (I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 281-2).

⁸⁷ Jos Keulers, *Het Evangelie Volgens Mattheüs* (De Boeken van het Nieuwe Testament: Roerland, Maaseik, 1950), cf. Lk. 4:39 'and he stood over her, and rebuked the fever and it left her.'

⁸⁸ H. Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) p. 538.

⁸⁹ 'it may be that we are to see in this... that Jesus will not go to the Gentiles himself, but will bring them his gifts through the work of his disciples' (J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) p. 124).

⁹⁰ Further evidence to support this assertion will be presented when examining Jesus' exorcisms in Chapter VI below.

⁹¹ For more on this suggestion and the 'sending of spirits' in ancient magic, see Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 109f.

centurion is acknowledging that Jesus ‘has authority over unseen powers’⁹², Van der Loos proposes that Jesus is employing ‘good’ powers to help overcome ‘evil powers’⁹³ and Godet asks:

‘Could not Jesus, who stood far above [the Centurion] in the hierarchy of being, having the powers of the invisible world at his disposal, make use, if he pleased, of a similar power?’⁹⁴

Finally, these spiritual ‘powers’ are identified by J. Duncan and M. Derrett as God’s angels:

‘the centurion by ‘servants’ thinks not of demons or disease (as some have thought), but angels, since angels are God’s, and so Jesus’, intermediaries and assistants.’⁹⁵

If these anonymous ‘others’ are to be understood as divine spiritual subordinates that are at Jesus’ disposal then the reader of the Gospels is faced with an immediate difficulty. Control over *demons* was a skill ordinarily expected of an exorcist, but command over *good spirits* was considered to be the work of a magician. We will fully explore the implications of this interpretation when we come to examine the relationship between the magician and his assisting spirit(s) below, but the overall value of this passage for the moment lies in its emphasis on Jesus’ overarching authority and the consequent invalidation of theories which account for the relationship between Jesus and his spiritual power in terms of *passive-possession*.

⁹² Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary in the Gospel of Matthew* (London: Paternoster, 1909) p. 126.

⁹³ H. Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, p. 538.

⁹⁴ F. L. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1881) p. 338.

⁹⁵ J. Duncan M. Derrett, ‘Law in the New Testament: The Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Centurion of Capernaum’, *NT 15* (1973) p. 179.



It is clear that suggesting that the Historical Jesus was subject to periods of passive-possession is a flawed argument. The key principle upon which the spirit-possession theory repeatedly falters is in its definition of possession as a state over which the individual holds no control and its attempt to apply this definition to Jesus in the Gospels when the Gospel authors fully contradict this possibility by continually emphasising the degree of authority that Jesus possesses over his powers to heal, exorcise and perform miracles of nature. We must therefore abandon the portrait of Jesus as a 'spirit-possessed healer' and consider whether Jesus had an autonomous role in the application of his spiritual power or that he had a spirit, or numerous spirits, under his control, as implied by the centurion in Mt. 8:5-13//Lk. 7:1-10.

Authority over spiritual bodies was a characteristic that was typically associated with the shaman in the ancient world. Such individuals were reportedly capable of inducing states of possession and yet they retained a degree of control over their powers. Therefore, since the balance between *spirit-possession* and *spirit-control* is very delicate in shamanism, its practitioners represent a 'half-way house' between the possessed and the magician and for this very reason a brief examination of shamanism is necessary at this juncture.

Shamanism and the command of the spirit world

The word 'shaman' derives from the Tungusian *šaman* or *saman* meaning 'medicine man' and the term has been liberally applied throughout decades of anthropological study to individuals claiming to derive power from a mystical communication with the spirit world.⁹⁶ Since careless use of the term has led to it being used interchangeably with 'magician', 'medium', or 'healer', some anthropologists have suggested that in order to preserve the exclusivity of the term 'shaman' the designation must be reserved for individuals who share common characteristics and symbolic themes which set them apart from other magio-religious practitioners.⁹⁷ As a result, modern anthropological studies tend to unite individuals who display evidence of these common characteristics and derive from various geographic and historical locations under the umbrella term 'shaman' in order to separate them from the alternative titles recounted above. For example, modern scholarship associates the Tungus medicine-men with the Greek 'shamans' who emerged from the Pythagorean schools during the fifth century B.C. on the basis of a common pattern of behaviours that are particular to these individuals.⁹⁸ These common features that are typical of shamanistic practice in various cultures tend to be found in the

⁹⁶ For the definition of the word 'shaman', see Berthold Laufer, 'Origin of the Word Shaman', *American Anthropologist*, New Series 19. 3. (1917) pp. 361-371.

⁹⁷ See Michael James Winkelman, 'Shamans and Other 'Magico-Religious' Healers: A Cross-Cultural Study of Their Origins, Nature, and Social Transformations', *Ethos* 18. 3 (1990) p. 309. Georg Luck notes that 'shaman' derives from the Tungusian language, but he adds that 'in the Greek world, this was usually a 'divine man', a 'prophet', a 'medium' or an inspired teacher, but it could also be applied to a sorcerer' (Georg Luck, 'Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature' in V. Flint, R. Gordon, G. Luck and D. Ogden (eds.) *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe vol. 2 (London: Athlone Press, 1999) p. 100 – 101).

⁹⁸ Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) p. 117.

formative stages of a shamanic vocation, namely the calling, a 'wilderness' experience and the reception of a spirit. Since these events are fundamentally associated with the life of the shaman, they are therefore significant factors when considering whether an individual is displaying shamanistic tendencies and behaviours.

The calling to a shamanic lifestyle

The call to a shamanic profession typically takes two forms; a hereditary 'passing on' of the shamanic tradition or a spontaneous selection episode in which the shaman encounters a divine being through a series of involuntary visions or illness. If the shaman is recruited by way of a hereditary calling, he must actively seek out spirits with whom to establish contact. However if the calling is spontaneous and initiated by a higher spiritual power, then the newly selected shaman has no voluntary control over his new vocation and the spirits will often impose an illness upon the chosen shaman until he accepts his calling.⁹⁹ This latter type of selection is described by Mircea Eliade as follows:

'one of the commonest forms of the future shaman's election is his encountering a divine or semidivine being, who appears to him through a dream, a sickness, or some other circumstances, tells him that he has been 'chosen', and indicates him henceforth to follow a new rule of life.'¹⁰⁰

Encountering and interacting with a spiritual being is a typical occurrence during an election experience. For example, John Ashton quotes from a study of shamanism in Japan in which the shamanic calling takes 'the form of a vision, in which a single

⁹⁹ See J. Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979).

¹⁰⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Technique of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964) p. 67.

supernatural being appears to him and commands him to abandon his former life.’¹⁰¹ Similarly, Eliade observes that the first ecstatic experiences of a shaman often involve a form of ‘celestial’ shamanic initiation in which the shaman finds himself in dialogue with gods or spirits.¹⁰² Winkelman points out that individuals who reported involuntary visions of alternative realities or spiritual beings were often favoured for training in most magico-religious traditions and ‘visualisation’ was a particularly desired prerequisite for shamanic training.¹⁰³ These visionary tendencies are rationalised by Silverman who suggests that the shaman’s ‘gross non-reality ideation’ and ‘abnormal perceptual experiences’ indicate that his mental state is similar to acute schizophrenia.¹⁰⁴

The shaman’s ‘wilderness’ experience

Upon receiving his calling, the next stage of a shamanic vocation typically involves a ‘crisis’ period in which the new shaman seeks out solitary isolation, often retreating into the wilderness or underground chambers, where he adopts various forms of self-denial such as fasting and celibacy and engages in prayer in order to prepare himself to receive

¹⁰¹ John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (Yale University Press, 2000) p. 33, citing Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), p. 24.

¹⁰² Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 34.

¹⁰³ M. Winkelman, ‘Magic: A theoretical reassessment’ *Current anthropology* 23 (1982) pp. 37-66. For more on the role of visions in shamanism, see Richard Noll, ‘Mental Imagery Cultivation as a Cultural Phenomenon: The Role of Visions in Shamanism’, *Current Anthropology* 26. 4 (1985) pp. 443- 461.

¹⁰⁴ J. Silverman, ‘Shamans and acute schizophrenia’, *American Anthropologist* 69 (1967) see pp. 21-31.

the spirit.¹⁰⁵ During this period of training, the new spiritual power will manifest itself as an illness¹⁰⁶ or through a series of prophetic dreams or seizures.¹⁰⁷

Many holy men throughout history have sought isolation in the early stages of their careers. For example, Moses went out into the wilderness of Ethiopia (Exod. 3; 33:11) and Pliny mentions that Zoroaster was in solitude for twenty years in the desert where he fasted, prayed and received divine guidance.¹⁰⁸ Underground caves were typically associated with Greek shamans seeking to achieve a wilderness state or recreate a symbolic descent into the realm of the dead¹⁰⁹ and these locations were used by Pancrates of Memphis, who claims to have become a magician by spending twenty-three years underground being instructed by Isis¹¹⁰, and Pythagoras, who was in isolation underground in Egypt for ten years.¹¹¹ Physical and spiritual isolation is sought in many forms of mysticism as a method of attaining a mental state of contemplation. Edmund Rich writes that the first step in the technique of achieving possession by the Christian God is 'for the soul to retreat within itself and there completely to recollect itself.'¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 64. cf also Blacker's description of a shaman who displays the 'neurasthenic behaviour of wandering off into the forest' (Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow*, pp. 24-5, cited by John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, p. 33).

¹⁰⁶ Eliade comments that the shamanic vocation manifests itself in the form of illness (Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 35).

¹⁰⁷ Eliade, *Shamanism* p. 33, 35.

¹⁰⁸ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 11:97.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, p. 9, 120-121.

¹¹⁰ Lucian, *Lover of Lies*, 34-46.

¹¹¹ See Iamblichus, *The Pythagorean Life*, trans. G. Clark (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989) p. 6.

¹¹² Quoted in E. O'Brien, *Varieties of Mystic Experience* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964) pp. 137-9.

Similarly, the German theologian Johannes Tauler, writing in the fourteenth century, states:

‘you should penetrate, using your entire strength to leave far behind every thought of your worldliness, which is as remote and alien to the inner self as only an animal can be...’¹¹³

This typical inclination towards physical and spiritual withdrawal when seeking a state of mystical union is described by William Sargant in terms of a negative psychological disorder:

‘it is in fact commonplace that the road to union with the divine often leads through a ‘valley of the shadow’, a stage of hopeless despair and deep sense of unworthiness which has all the symptoms that we now recognize in psychiatry as indicative of depressive illness.’¹¹⁴

The shaman's communication with the spirits

Once the newly-selected shaman has adopted his calling and completed the necessary training, he begins to experience seizures, trance-states or periods of an altered state of consciousness (ASC) in which his soul leaves his body and ascends to the heavens or descends into the underworld. The shaman's engagement with the spirit world is dissimilar to that experienced by the spirit-possessed healer in that the shaman retains his memory throughout the trance and he is able to induce the spirits to enter his body

¹¹³ Quoted in E. O'Brien, *Varieties of Mystic Experience*, p. 172.

¹¹⁴ William Sargant, *The Mind Possessed*, p. 80.

without fear of being controlled by them.¹¹⁵ For example, Eliade explains that a shaman is able to control his spirits 'without thereby becoming their instrument'¹¹⁶ and Shirokogoroff states that one of the distinctive characteristics of the Siberian shaman is that they are 'persons of both sexes who have mastered spirits, who at will can introduce these spirits into themselves and use their power over the spirits in their own interests'.¹¹⁷ Since the shaman usually operates within a cultural or historical world-view which considers demonic entities to be the root cause of most problems that can befall humanity, by acting as an intermediary and establishing a relationship with benevolent spirits the shaman can employ them to help combat problems caused by other spirits.¹¹⁸ Therefore, when the shaman returns to his community he discovers that he is able to use these skills to benefit individuals or the community in general, particularly by performing healings, exorcisms and divination.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Townsend observes that the shaman remembers at least some aspects of his experience while in trance (Joan B Townsend, 'Shamanism' in *Anthropology of Religion: A Handbook*, ed. S. D. Glazier (Westport: Praeger, 1999) pp. 431-32).

¹¹⁶ Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ S. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* (London: Routledge, 1935) p. 269. Richard Noll believes that Shirokogoroff's description can be applied cross-culturally (Richard Noll, 'Mental Imagery Cultivation as a Cultural Phenomenon: The Role of Visions in Shamanism', *Current Anthropology* 26. 4 (1985) p. 448). For more on the shaman's control over spirits, see Joan B Townsend, 'Shamanism', pp. 431-32; R. Firth, 'Problem and Assumption in an Anthropological Study of Religion' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 39 (1959) pp. 129-48; I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998); D. Landy (ed.) *Culture, Disease and Healing: Studies in medical anthropology* (New York: Macmillan, 1977) p. 417; A. L. Siikala, *The Rite Techniques of the Siberian Shaman* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1978), p. 334; M. Harner, *The Way of the Shaman: A Guide to Power and Healing* (New York: Harper and Row 1980) p. 20 and R. Noll, 'Shamanism and Schizophrenia: A state-specific approach to the 'schizophrenia metaphor' of shamanic states', *American Ethnologist* (1983) pp. 444-45.

¹¹⁸ Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 107.

¹¹⁹ Joan B. Townsend, 'Shamanism', pp. 431-32.

Jesus the shaman?

The opposing models of shamanism and passive spirit-possession are contrasted by the anthropologist Luc de Heusch, whose argument is concisely summarised by I. M. Lewis as follows:

‘The first is an ascent of man to the gods: the second is the descent of the gods on man.’¹²⁰

Clearly, the Gospel authors would not seek to impose the former reading upon the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, especially considering de Heusch adds that the shaman revels in a sense of pride in his equality with the gods.¹²¹ In addition, since the shaman not only communicates with divine beings but also with semi-divine and lesser spirits, to accept the possibility that Jesus had shaman-like abilities is to acknowledge that his spiritual power-source may not have been necessarily divine.

Nevertheless, it is evident that certain events in the evangelists’ descriptions of Jesus’ life have parallels with the behaviours reported of the shaman. For example, the abnormal perceptual phenomena of a voice from the heavens and a spirit descending in the shape of a dove at Jesus’ baptism imitates an account of spiritual election and a call to a shamanic profession (Mt. 3:1-17//Mk. 1:9-11//Lk. 3:21-22). James Dunn in particular recognises that the baptismal accounts describe a visionary experience and Dunn adds reference to Jesus’ vision of Satan falling from the heavens (Lk. 10:18) to support his suggestion that

¹²⁰ I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* 2nd ed. (London, Routledge, 1998) p. 44.

¹²¹ See Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, p. 44.

‘Jesus certainly seems to have had one or two visionary experiences’.¹²² The subsequent temptation narrative imitates the crisis period of the shaman; Jesus withdraws into the Judean wilderness¹²³ (a place considered the dwelling place of demons, cf. Mt. 12:43–45), where he endures a period of forty days fasting (Mk. 1:12//Mt. 4:2//Lk. 4:2) and encounters demonic and divine spiritual beings (Satan and angels; Mk. 1:12//Mt. 4:11).¹²⁴ Luigi Schiavo proposes that the reader should understand the temptation narrative as an ‘ecstatic text’ in which Jesus undergoes a period of fasting and purification in the wilderness in order to enter into a shamanic ASC trance and communicate with devils and angels.¹²⁵ Schiavo suggests that the use of the presupposition ἐν in Lk. 4:1 indicates that this passage ‘cannot be dealing with a physical change from one place to another (which would be εἰς, but with an interior, spiritual transformation)’, therefore he proposes that the temptation is to be understood as a ‘transcendental experience of religious ecstasy’.¹²⁶

Although it is possible to recount certain events of Jesus’ life in terms of a shamanic profession and a shamanistic framework would certainly allow for the degree of observable ἐξουσία that Jesus appears to have over his powers, many of the prior

¹²² J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, p. 85. Marcus Borg also considers the baptism and temptation narratives to be visionary accounts (M. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) pp. 42–43).

¹²³ As previously discussed on pg. 158 above, Matthew and Luke use the softer ἀνήχθη / ἦγγο (‘led’, Mt. 4:1; Lk. 4:1) to describe Jesus’ withdrawal into the wilderness, while Mark uses the forceful ἐκβάλλει (‘drive out’, Mk. 1:12).

¹²⁴ For example, John Ashton suggests that Mark’s account of the temptation ‘invites a reading as a shaman’s trial’ (Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, p. 67).

¹²⁵ Luigi Schiavo, ‘The Temptation of Jesus: The Eschatological Battle and the New Ethic of the First Followers of Jesus in Q’, *JSNT* 25.2 (2002) pp. 141–164.

¹²⁶ Luigi Schiavo, ‘The Temptation of Jesus’, p. 145.

objections that were encountered when attempting to apply a model of passive possession re-emerge in a comparison to shamanism, namely the absence of trance states and questions regarding the exclusivity of power in view of the transmission of ἐξουσία to Jesus' disciples in Mk. 6:7-13//Mt. 10:1//Lk. 9:1. If Jesus was subject to the seizures and trance states that were typical of shamanistic behaviour, then surely this behaviour would have been recorded in the polemical materials, if not in the Gospels themselves. Not only are shamanic ASC and trance states largely absent from the Gospels, but other techniques used by shamans to induce visions or achieve communication with spirits, such as frenzy and the use of drugs, are also not mentioned. James Dunn, for example, rejects a shamanic interpretation of Jesus' interaction with the Spirit due to the absence of these techniques and draws particular attention to Jesus' rejection of fasting (cf. Mk. 2:18, Mt. 11:19//Lk. 7:34) to demonstrate that 'his reputation was quite the opposite from that of the introspective ascetic who tries to induce mystical ecstasy.'¹²⁷ In addition, since the shaman is chosen either as the result of his hereditary tradition or through a calling by the spirits, the inclusion of a passage in all three Synoptics in which the disciples are able to share in Jesus' power and Jesus himself is able to choose who will acquire this power (Mk. 6:7-13//Mt. 10:1//Lk. 9:1) clearly contradicts the theory that this miracle-working power was granted through a person-specific spiritual election.

¹²⁷ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, p. 85. The inclusion of καὶ νηστεία ('and fasting') in Mark 9: 29 is generally considered to be a secondary addition by the early church (see B. M. Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: UBS, 1971) p. 101).



If the relationship between Jesus and his miracle-working δύναμις cannot be conclusively compared to shamanistic practice due to the absence of trance states, Jesus' apparent rejection of forms of self-denial and his ability to transmit his power to others, then the next progressive step is to abandon all theories of spirit-possession and consider the possibility that Jesus was able to perform miracles by manipulating spirits through magical means. It is within this alternative framework that Jesus' opponents frequently attempt to explain the source of his powers and this will therefore be our next consideration.

The dead, the demonic and the divine: the magical manipulation of spirits in antiquity

Spiritual intermediaries providing a linking mechanism between man and God appear in the religious systems of almost every culture throughout history; from the 'minor spirits' of Mesopotamian mythology¹²⁸ to the *jinn* of Islam¹²⁹ and the angelic/demonic hierarchy of Christianity. The ancient Greeks identified these intermediary spiritual entities by the term δαίμων (*daimon*), a word which seems to have been broadly applied to lesser gods, the souls of deceased humans, the gods of other religions and even the human soul itself.¹³⁰ To use the Hellenistic term *daimon* as synonymous with its modern counterpart

¹²⁸ See Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: British Museum Press, 1992).

¹²⁹ The *jinn* are spiritual beings, having free-will like humans, but capable of possessing human bodies. cf the *Koran* 72: 1- 28.

¹³⁰ For more on the term δαίμων see Foerster, 'δαίμων/δαιμόνιον', *TDNT* 2, pp. 1-20.

demon, a term exclusively reserved for evil beings, is to misconstrue the use of the term in the first centuries since the Greek *daimones* were generally regarded as having both benevolent and malevolent intentions.¹³¹ The intermediate position of these spirits between God and man is described by both Plato and Apuleius¹³² and Valerie Flint concisely surmises their relation to God and man as follows:

‘The Greek ‘daimon’ might generally be described... as a force, or energy, less potent than that of ‘theos’, or God, but far more so than that of humans.’¹³³

The prevalence of these *daimones* throughout antiquity is observed by Naomi Janowitz who comments that ‘life with daimons was as close as with one’s neighbours.’¹³⁴ Equally, Plutarch could not conceive of a world without ‘daimons’¹³⁵ and Pythagoras imagined

¹³¹ This is demonstrated in the Greek word for ‘happiness’ (εὐδαιμονία), which literally means ‘having a good demon’. Richard Kieckhefer acknowledges the confusion between the terms *demon* and *daimon* as follows: ‘one can discern...a tension between the early Christian notion of demons as fallen angels...and the Graeco-Roman conception of *daimones* (or *daemones* in Latin) as spirits linked with the world of nature’ (Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997) p. 154).

¹³² Plato, *Timaeus* 90. Apuleius refers to Socrate’s *daimon* in order to demonstrate that the human soul could be called a *daimon* while the person is alive and even after death. He adds: ‘there are certain divine powers of a middle nature, sinute in this interval of the air between highest ether and earth below, through whom our aspirations and our deserts are conveyed to the Gods. The Greeks call them ‘daimons’’ (Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis*, 9).

¹³³ Valerie Flint, ‘The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions’ in Flint, Gordon, Luck and Ogden (eds.) *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, p. 281, cf pp. 281 – 292 for more on *daimons*.

¹³⁴ Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 35. For more on daimons, see pp. 28 – 35.

¹³⁵ See Plutarch, *De Defectu Oraculorum*, Chapter 13 in Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 5.

that 'the whole air is full of souls which are called genii (daimones) or heroes.'¹³⁶

Whenever a worldview accommodates the existence of malevolent or benevolent spiritual beings such as the Greek *daimones*, there is often an accompanying magical worldview which claims that extraordinary acts can be achieved through the magical manipulation of these spirit agents. Accordingly, many magicians in antiquity sought to secure a daimon, or even a god, as an assisting spirit who would in turn empower the magician to perform miracles.

The assisting, or familiar, spirit

A spirit whose obedience and power had been obtained by a magician was known in the ancient world as his attending, or 'familiar', spirit. The term 'familiar spirit' was adopted from the Latin *familiaris*, meaning a 'household servant,' and it was intended to convey the notion of a spirit behaving as a servant to a magician. In a much simpler sense, the term 'familiar' implies that the spirit and magician enter into a 'familiar' relationship with one another. Justin Martyr mentions the existence of these spirits in his *First Apology*¹³⁷ and Eusebius wrote of their value to the pagans in his *Oration on the 30th Anniversary of the Reign of Constantine*:

'they endeavoured to secure the familiar aid of these spirits, and the unseen powers which move through the tracts of air, by charms of forbidden magic, and the compulsion of unhallowed songs and incantations.'¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Diogenes Laertius, *Pythagoras, The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, book 8, (trans. R. D. Hicks (London: Heinemann, 1925) 8:32).

¹³⁷ Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 18.

¹³⁸ Eusebius, *Oration on the 30th Anniversary of the Reign of Constantine (Laus Constantini)* 13.

The employment of a 'familiar' spirit was widely acknowledged in connection with those who claimed to produce wondrous signs and miracles in the ancient world. For example, Solomon was thought to have control over a demon that in turn had control over many others¹³⁹ and, in contrast, Plotinus claimed that he had a personal spirit 'not being from among the demons, but a god'.¹⁴⁰ Plutarch writes that Socrates was in possession of an *agathodaimon* ('good daemon') which whom he had 'frequent concordance of the daimon with his own decisions, to which it lent a divine sanction'¹⁴¹ and a belief in the magical use of these spirits survived until the witch trials of the seventeenth century.¹⁴²

As the source of assisting spirits was highly debated in antiquity, individuals suspected of carrying out miracles using familiar spirits were often viewed with suspicion. The Old Testament laws repeatedly condemn those who have familiar spirits as their possession constituted idolatry and they were believed to be the spirits working behind many false prophets.¹⁴³ The dubious origins of assisting spirits and the condemnations of those using them in the Hebrew bible resulted in the possession of a familiar spirit being synonymous with the possession of a demon. Therefore a charge of possessing a familiar spirit would

¹³⁹ *The Testament of Solomon*, 11f.

¹⁴⁰ Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* X.

¹⁴¹ Plutarch writes that 'heaven seems to have attached to Socrates from his earliest years as his guide in life a vision of this kind, which alone, 'showed him the way, illuminating his path,' in matters dark and inscrutable to human wisdom, through the frequent concordance of the daimon with his own decisions, to which it lent a divine sanction' (Plutarch, *On Socrates' Daimon* 10. (trans. P. H. De Lacy and B. Einarson (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library 1959) pp. 405-07)).

¹⁴² F. H. Amphlett Micklewright, 'A Note on the Witch-Familiar in Seventeenth Century England', *Folklore* 58. 2 (1947), pp. 285-287.

¹⁴³ The KJV tends to use the term 'familiar spirit', whereas the RSV translates as 'medium'. Cf. Lev. 19:31, 20:6, 20:27; Deut. 18:11; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chr. 33:6.

be made by an individual's opponents in order to draw attention to the 'demonic' source of his or her powers. It is within this sceptical milieu that Irenaeus accused Marcus of possessing 'a demon as his familiar spirit, by means of whom he seems able to prophesy'¹⁴⁴ and the Christians accused Simon Magus of performing his miracles using the spirit of a boy who he created out of thin air and then sacrificed (Acts 8).¹⁴⁵ However, accusations of demonic collusion were occasionally exacerbated by the magicians themselves since, as Richard Kieckhefer observes, 'it was not made easier by the magician's habit of calling more or less indiscriminately on spirits of both kinds, as well as allegedly neutral spirits.'¹⁴⁶

The ancient Greeks referred to the magician's attending spirit as a *πάρεδρος* ('paredros') and Leda Jean Ciruolo in her study entitled 'Supernatural Assistants in the Greek Magical Papyri' interprets this term as an adjective meaning 'sitting beside or near', from the verb *παρεδρεύω*, 'to wait or attend upon.'¹⁴⁷ Rites employing a *πάρεδρος* feature heavily within the Greek magical papyri.¹⁴⁸ For example, in *The Spell of Pnouthis* (PGM I.42-195) the magician addresses the *πάρεδρος* as a 'friendly assistant, a beneficent god who serves me whenever I say' (I. 89-90). In verses 160-63 of this spell, the magician requests that the *πάρεδρος* reveals his name and upon obtaining this name, the magician is able to control

¹⁴⁴ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.13.3.

¹⁴⁵ See Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. 131.

¹⁴⁶ Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century*, p. 158.

¹⁴⁷ L. J. Ciruolo, 'Supernatural Assistants in the Greek Magical Papyri' in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.) *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Boston: Brill, 2001) p. 279.

¹⁴⁸ See PGM I. 1-42, 42-195; IV. 1331-89, 1716-1870, 1928-2005, 2006-2125, 2145-2240; VII. 862-918; XI. a.1-40; XII. 14-95.

the spirit and henceforth gains the ability to walk on water, become invisible, kill his enemies and cure the sick.¹⁴⁹ The spirit even supplies water, wine and bread. Of the many benefits resulting from the possession of this assisting spirit, the instructions for the rite promise that ‘you will be worshipped as a god since you have a god as a friend’ (I. 191) and when the magician dies, the πάρεδρος will ‘wrap [up] your body as befits a god’ and ‘take your spirit and carry it into the air with him’ (I. 178-179).

The possession of a ‘familiar’ spirit was considered to be such an integral part of ancient magic that they were deemed to be a contributing factor to most magical operations. Indeed Fritz Graf observes that ‘one does not become a true *magus* without such an assistant.’¹⁵⁰ These spirits were highly valued for their ease of accessibility and practicality, since they allowed the magician to perform his magic without the need for elaborate ritual or technique.¹⁵¹ For instance, in admiration of the efficiency of the πάρεδρος in PGM IV. 2081-85, the author of the spell writes that ‘most of the magicians, who carried their instruments, even put them aside and used him as an assistant.’ These spirits were also particularly valued for their instantaneous response to the magician’s

¹⁴⁹ ‘he will quickly freeze rivers and seas and in such a way that you can run over them firmly’ (I. 120-121), ‘he will tell you about the illness of a man...and he will also give [you both] wild herbs and the power to cure...’ (I. 188-190). In lines 181-83, the text instructs the user ‘Whenever you wish to do something, speak his name alone into the air [and] say, [“Come!”]....and say to him “Perform this task,” and he does it at once....)’ We will address the importance of the possession of the name of a spirit in Chapter VI.

¹⁵⁰ Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (London: Harvard University Press, 1997) p. 109.

¹⁵¹ Morton Smith comments: ‘A magician who has such a spirit at his service can also dispense with rites and spells, he need only give his orders and they will be obeyed.’ (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 74).

requests. For example, upon obtaining command over the spirit in *The Spell of Pnouthis* (PGM I. 42 – 195) the magician is told ‘he will quickly respond to you about whatever you want’ (I. 78). Later in the same text, the author states: ‘say to him, “Perform this task,” and he does it at once’ (I. 183). The expression ‘quickly, quickly’ also occurs frequently in the Greek magical papyri when commanding a spirit.¹⁵² Consequently, assisting spirits were often employed by magicians to perform miracles at a distance, as Mauss observes:

‘the attendant demon or animal is the personal and effective agent of the magician. Through it he acts from afar.’¹⁵³

Reconsidering the healing of the centurion’s servant (Mt. 8:5-13//Lk. 7:1-10) in light of these examples alone, the presence in this Gospel passage of a spiritual power which works under Jesus’ command, responds immediately to his request and performs healings at a distance is highly reminiscent of the magician’s use of a familiar spirit.¹⁵⁴ However it is not solely within this passage alone that our suspicions of spirit manipulation are raised. Further evidence which suggests that Jesus was engaging in spirit manipulation appears sporadically throughout the Gospels. For example, the notion that Jesus could summon angels to his aid is suggested in Mt. 26:52 and we read that angels were willing

¹⁵² For example, PGM IV. 153: ‘quickly, quickly; immediately, immediately’, also PGM IV. 972-3: ‘now, now; immediately, immediately; quickly, quickly.’

¹⁵³ M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, p. 80.

¹⁵⁴ Especially considering the heavy use of military terminology in Luke’s Gospel (see pp. 175-176 above) and Leda Jean Ciraiolo’s observation that the word ‘paredros’ was an ‘adjective used as a substantive to designate a variety of governmental and military officials’ (L. J. Ciraiolo, ‘Supernatural Assistants in the Greek Magical Papyri’ in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.) *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Boston: Brill, 2001) pp. 279-293).

to 'serve' Jesus immediately following the temptations in Mk. 1:13//Mt. 4:11.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, Jesus warns the seventy-two in Lk. 10:20 'do not rejoice in this *that the spirits are subject to you*, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven' (my emphasis). Although in this instance the term πνεύματα is commonly understood as a neuter term for 'demons' or 'evil spirits'¹⁵⁶, it is replaced by δαιμόνια in some manuscripts perhaps with the intention to eradicate the interpretation that good spirits were under the disciples' control.¹⁵⁷

In addition, two direct charges of the magical manipulation of spirits are made against Jesus by his opponents in the Gospels. In response to Jesus' healing of the blind and mute demoniac, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of possessing a demonic spirit through which he performs his miracles (Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15). Equally, when Herod receives the news of Jesus' miracles he immediately fears that Jesus has possession of the soul of John the Baptist and that he is using John to perform his miracles (Mk. 6:14-29//Mt. 14:2). Ultimately, Jesus corrects any alleged perversion of his spiritual power-source by claiming that he derives his miracle-working powers from the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 12:10). As the dead and the demonic were considered to be valuable sources

¹⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly, the author of Luke omits the servitude of the angels. Perhaps this is a further example of the omission of material bearing magical connotations within the Gospel of Luke (the addition of the Angel of Agony in Lk. 22:43-44 is often considered to be an interpolation and is treated as such in many modern bible versions).

¹⁵⁶ Dalman notes that τὰ πνεύματα 'when unqualified, means 'evil spirits' in a Jewish context' (G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902) p. 203).

¹⁵⁷ According to the critical apparatus of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed.), the variant δαιμόνια in Lk. 10:20 appears in uncial D, also in family 1, the miniscule manuscripts 565. 2542, sy^{s.c.p.}, bo^{pt} and Did Cyr.

of attending spirits in antiquity, the allegations made by the Pharisees and Herod are clearly charges of magic. However, since divine spirits constituted the third and perhaps the most frequent source of attending spirits in the ancient world, implications of spirit manipulation cannot be discounted from Jesus' defence in Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 12:10.

CHAPTER VI

BY THE PRINCE OF DEMONS: BINDING, MAGICAL EXORCISM AND THE PHARISEES' CHARGE OF DEMONIC MANIPULATION

IN MK. 3:22-37//MT. 12:22-20//LK. 11:14-23

**'So Ornias went and said to Beelzeboul, "Come, Solomon calleth thee."
And Beelzeboul said, "Tell me, who is this Solomon of whom you speak."
And Ornias cast the ring upon the breast of Beelzeboul, saying, "Solomon
the King calleth thee." And Beelzeboul cried out with a loud voice, and
cast forth a great flame of fire, and rose up and followed Ornias.'**

~ The Testament of Solomon, XIII ~

Having directly witnessed Jesus' miraculous cures and his authoritative command over demons, the Pharisees grow increasingly suspicious of his activities and eventually charge him with being in collusion with demonic beings and using Beelzeboul as the authority by which he performs his miracles (Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15). The presence of this allegation in all three Synoptic Gospels suggests that this confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees was a well-documented event that can be traced back to the authentic Jesus tradition and/or that the Gospel writers considered this story to be a valuable literary vehicle through which to reveal that Jesus was acting in the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:31//Mk. 3:29//Lk. 12:10). It is unlikely that the evangelists would deliberately invent an accusation in which an alternative power source for Jesus' miracles is proposed since this could potentially tarnish the divine nature and messianic authority of Jesus. Equally, if the ultimate purpose of the accusation is to reveal the presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' ministry, then surely it would have been far simpler and less harmful

to have Jesus make an instantaneous revelation of his divine power source without the need for hostile provocation.

Whether the allegation made by the Pharisees is to be understood as Beelzebul's possession of Jesus, or Jesus' possession of Beelzebul, is of central importance for the value of this passage to our present study. The former reading suggests that Jesus was possessed, however the latter clearly warrants a charge of magic. This distinction is summarised by C. H. Kraeling:

‘In the relations of men and demons there are two basic possibilities, either the demon has a man in his possession, or a man has a demon under his control. In the first instance the demon is the master and the man his unfortunate plaything; in the second the demon is the servant and the man a magician.’¹

There are two charges made against Jesus in Mark's account; that he has Beelzebul (Βεελζεβοὺλ ἔχει, 3:22) and that he is using Beelzebul to carry out his exorcisms ('by the prince of demons he casts out demons', 3:22).² Whether ἔχει ('to have') in Mk. 3:22 signifies possession *by* a demon or the possession *of* a demon is subject to much debate. For example, Graham Twelftree argues that the implication in this passage is that Jesus was *controlled by* Beelzebul since 'in the Gospels ἔχειν does not mean 'to have in one's power' but 'to be controlled by', in this case by an evil spirit.'³ Certainly, situating the Pharisees' claim that Jesus has Beelzebul (Mk. 3:22) immediately following the

¹ C. H. Kraeling, 'Was Jesus accused of Necromancy?', *JBL* 59 (1940) p. 153.

² The same charge of 'having a demon' is brought against Jesus in John 7:20 and against John the Baptist in Mt. 11:18//Lk. 7:33.

³ Twelftree's argument is based on the ancient Greek notion that only 'good' spirits can be controlled, whereas 'evil' spirits take possession of men (Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) pp. 198-9).

observation that 'he is beside himself' (Mk. 3:21) and linking the two verses via the conjunctive καί, the author of Mark suggests that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul and therefore he 'is beside himself', ie. exhibiting possession behaviour.⁴

Although the location of the passage in Mark supports a reading of demonic possession, I would suggest that the Pharisees' accusation is not concerned with Jesus' possession *by* Beelzebul, but his control *of* Beelzebul. Since Matthew and Luke make no mention of possession in their parallel accounts and simply retain the accusation of using Beelzebul to cast out demons (Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15), we may safely assume that they do not intend to address any theories of possession. Furthermore, the accusation is pre-emptively reinforced without reference to possession traits by the author of Matthew in 9:34: 'he casts out demons by the prince of demons'. If the allegation made by the Pharisees is not one of possession but of spirit control, then this is clearly a charge of magic. Accordingly, Eric Eve proposes that the Pharisees accuse Jesus of magical spirit manipulation:

'Jesus is not...charged with being possessed but with having Beelzebul... which could mean, having a spirit under his control (i.e. being a sorcerer or spirit-medium...).' ⁵

The implicit charge of the magical manipulation of Beelzebul in this passage is drawn out in the parallel allegation found in the *Acts of Pilate* 1.1 ('they say unto him: He is a sorcerer, and by Beelzebub the prince of the devils he casteth out devils') and a similar

⁴ For more on possession behaviour in this passage, see Chapter V. A similar association between possession and madness is explicitly made in Jn. 10:20 in which the people accuse Jesus saying: 'he has a demon, and he is mad'.

⁵ Eric Eve, *The Jewish Context of Jesus' Miracles* (JSNTSupp 231; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) p. 328.

reading of magical spirit manipulation in Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15 is supported by Kraeling, Samain and Morton Smith.⁶ For instance, Kraeling interprets the charge as follows:

‘this does not mean that Jesus is the unfortunate plaything of Beelzebul; it means, rather, that Jesus is accused of being a magician who by incantation and magical practices has obtained control over Beelzebul and makes him do his bidding even when this is to Beelzebul’s own disadvantage.’⁷

Why the Pharisees would raise a charge of magic when their own exorcists were engaging in the very same activities is puzzling, especially since the Jewish exorcists were often suspected of practising magic themselves.⁸ Noticing this weakness in the Pharisees’ argument, Jesus defends his actions by questioning the spiritual authority used by the Jewish exorcists to carry out their exorcisms (Mt. 12:27//Lk. 11:19). The answer to which the Pharisees are silently compelled is that both Jesus and the Jewish exorcists act in the same, legitimate power. Morton Smith observes this discrepancy and suggests that since the other exorcists were admired while Jesus was accused of magic there must have been ‘some difference, between him and them, which led to his being charged with

⁶ Samain draws the following conclusions from the Pharisees’ charge: ‘le Christ est maître de Béalzéboul et le domine au point de l’employer pour opérer ses exorcismes...Δαιμονιον έχει signifie donc encore que Jésus est un faux prophète magician’ (J. Samain, ‘L’accusation de Magie contre le Christ dans les Evangiles’, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 15 (1938) pp. 468, 483). Morton Smith makes a bold conjecture by stating: ‘he “has,” not merely has control of, but is united with, indeed, he *is* the demon Beelzebul’ (Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978) p. 32).

⁷ Kraeling, ‘Was Jesus accused of Necromancy?’, p. 154.

⁸ For example, Celsus says that the Jews ‘worship angels and are addicted to sorcery’ (Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.26). In addition, Justin Martyr believes that the Jewish exorcists used magical techniques and the name of God when performing their exorcisms (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 85. 3).

magic.’⁹ Either the Pharisees were secretly hoping that a comparison would not be drawn to their own exorcists, or Jesus exhibited behaviour and/or used specific techniques that were genuinely considered to be magical and that differed noticeably from the methods employed by the Jewish exorcists. Since the Gospel authors do not portray Jesus using traditional exorcistic techniques such as the use of prayer, herbs and amulets when exorcising demons, the enemies of Jesus may well have assumed, in the absence of these methods, that his miracles were achieved through the magical manipulation of a demonic power. Exorcists regularly encountered an allegation of magic in the ancient world as the procedures used to control demons in order to exorcise them were often identical to the techniques used to employ demons in the service of a magician. Since an ability to control demons was considered to dangerously skirt the boundaries of magic, the natural logical progression was to assume, as Eric Eve suggests, ‘that someone who can control spirits is probably in league with spirits.’¹⁰ This suspicion was exacerbated by rumours that were rife in the early centuries concerning magicians such as Simon Magus, who was accused of performing his miracles using a demon (hence the activities of Simon may have influenced the accusation in Jn. 8:48 ‘Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?’).¹¹ As a result, demons, or even Satan himself, were often considered to be the powers behind the operations of enemies and the indictment that an opponent performed magic with the aid of demons was a common polemical tool in the ancient world.¹²

⁹ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 143.

¹⁰ Eve, *The Jewish Context of Jesus’ Miracles*, p. 370.

¹¹ See Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 26.2, *Acts of Peter* V and the *Clementine Recognitions* II.

¹² Irenaeus, for example, believed that his enemies perform their miracles through the help of evil spirits (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.15.6).

If the accusation made against Jesus in Mk. 3:22 has its source in the authentic Jesus tradition, then in view of the close association between exorcism and magical practice in the ancient world it is understandable that questions arose concerning Jesus' power source and accusations of magical demon control were made against him. John Hull notes that the connection between magic and exorcism was so close in the ancient world that simply knowing about demons was thought to demonstrate an inclination towards practicing magic and on many occasions Jesus is presented by the Gospel authors as being far from naïve in the operations of evil spirits.¹³ For example, C. F. Evans comments that Jesus' words in Lk. 11:24-26 concerning the existence of demons independently of the body and multiple spirits in humans read like 'an extract from a text book on demonology.'¹⁴

Alternatively, if the presence of the Pharisees' charge simply functions as an opportunity for the Gospel authors to combat claims of magical spirit manipulation, then we would naturally expect Jesus to respond with evidence to the contrary. This effect is partly achieved by Jesus' assertion that the Pharisees blaspheme against the Holy Spirit (Mk.

¹³ John Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd Series 28 (London: SCM Press, 1974) p. 51. For example, the theologian and occultist Giordano Bruno states: 'he who knows how to bind needs to have an understanding of all things, or at least of the nature, inclination, habits, uses and purposes of the particular things that he is to bind' (see Richard J. Blackwell and Robert de Lucca (eds.), *Giordano Bruno: Cause, Principle & Unity: And Essays on Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 184). Also, Naomi Janowitz observes that in ritual magic 'the officiant needs to have encyclopaedic knowledge of where angels/demons live, what their roles are, their regular and secret names' (N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 51).

¹⁴ C. F. Evans, *St. Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990) p. 494. In addition, Jesus teaches the disciples in Mk. 9:29 that 'this kind [of demon] cannot be driven out by anything but prayer', thereby implying that he is aware that certain techniques must be used to exorcise particular types of demons.

3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 12:10), however certain elements in the convoluted crescendo which concludes with this statement reveal that Jesus has a keen awareness of the terminology and methods used to control demons and his demonstration of this knowledge has far reaching implications for magical practice.

The magical binding of spirits in the ancient world

Even to those entirely unfamiliar with the vocabulary of ancient magic, the principles of ‘binding’ are self-explanatory; by binding something you are either restraining it from operating or forcefully uniting it with something else. Methods of ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ are largely based on the theory of ‘sympathetic’ magic which functions on the premise that the spiritual world is tied to the corporeal world by a series of invisible threads that can be manipulated by the magician on earth to achieve similar effects in the heavenly realm. Therefore, whatever is bound or loosed by the magician on the earth is bound or loosed in heaven.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ are terms that were closely linked in antiquity with exorcism and the control of demons. The apocalyptic writings in particular refer to ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ as a means of restraining (binding) and releasing (loosing) demons. For example, the angel Raphael binds the demon Asmodeus in Tobit 8:3, Raphael binds Azaz’el in 1 Enoch 10:4-6 and the new priest is able to bind Beliar in the Testament of Levi. 18:12. Similarly, Satan is bound (ἔδησεν) for a thousand

¹⁵ Parallels between this theory and Jesus’ teachings in Mt. 16:19 and 18:18 will be addressed below. John Hull accredits the origin of these uniting ties to the magi and adds that a belief in their existence is essential to the magical worldview (Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p. 30, see also 37-38). In addition, Plotinus mentions that a sorcerer is someone who is able to use the power of sympathetic magic (Plotinus, *Enneads*, 4. 4. 40).

years in Rev. 20:2 (although Rev. 20:3 says that he will be loosed (λυθῆναι) after serving this time).

Magical texts detailing the employment of binding formulae were so commonplace in ancient Hellenistic magic that Matthew Dickie refers to the binding spell as the ‘stock-in-trade of many magicians’¹⁶ and Charles Stewart states: ‘binding (*desmos*) is one of the most basic concepts in Greek sorcery’.¹⁷ The Greek term for a binding spell is κατάδεσμος (from καταδέω, ‘to bind down’) although these spells are more popularly referred to under the Latin term *defixio* (from *defigo*, ‘to nail down’).¹⁸ More than 1, 100 *defixiones* have been retrieved from a variety of locations and they generally date from around the fourth and fifth century BC and take the form of small, thin sheets of lead that are inscribed with spells which are intended to influence or harm other individuals.¹⁹ Binding formulas were

¹⁶ Matthew Dickie, *Magic & Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*. (London: Routledge, 2001) p 17. In addition, Daniel Ogden associates the magician with ‘the manufacture of binding spells’ (Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 16).

¹⁷ Charles Stewart elaborates on this: ‘when something is bound it is constricted and unable to follow its proper and natural course’ (Charles Stewart, *Demons and the Devil: Moral Imagination in Modern Greek Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) p. 231).

¹⁸ Christopher A. Faraone, ‘The Agnostic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells’ in C. A. Faraone and Obbink, D. (eds.) *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p. 21, n. 3. Faraone points out that *defixio* ‘seems to be the preferred terminology among scholars today’ (p. 21, n. 3).

¹⁹ See Faraone, ‘The Agnostic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells’ (p. 3) and Dickie, *Magic & Magicians* (p. 17). D. R. Jordan adds that curse tablets ‘continued in use in Mediterranean lands until at least the sixth century CE’ (D. R. Jordan, ‘A Survey of Greek Defixiones not included in the special corpora’, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1985) p. 151. For more on curse tablets and ancient binding spells, see John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) pp. 78–115.

employed in ancient magic for a variety of purposes; either for exorcisms²⁰, to unite a person with, or bind a person to, a certain state of being such as love, hatred, sickness and health, to restrain thieves from stealing, armies from marching or dangerous animals from biting, to affect the commercial success of a rival by binding their profits or their crops from maturing, to separate lovers or bind lovers together²¹, or to affect judicial verdicts by binding the performance of those in court.²²

Christopher Farone classifies the binding formulae of the ancient world into four different categories.²³ The first is a direct binding formula in which the first person singular verb is used (I bind.....) along with the names of the individual to whom the curse is directed. For example, in the incantation accompanying the construction of a *defixio* in PGM V. 304-69, the magician is instructed to say 'I bind his mind and his brains, his desire, his actions' (V. 327-328). The second is a prayer formula which uses a second person imperative to urge the deity to do the action on behalf of the performer. The third is a wish formula, i.e. 'may it be successful'. The fourth is a *similia similibus* formula, in which the victim is cursed to become like, or similar to, another object.

²⁰ See PGM IV. 1227-64 ('Rite for driving out demons') in which the magician states 'Come out, daimon, since I bind you with unbreakable adamantine fetters' (IV. 1246).

²¹ See PGM IV. 296-466 ('Wondrous spell for binding a lover') in which the magician says 'I adjure all demons in this place...attract and bind her' (IV. 350). Stewart notes that 'the theme of binding is ancient and seems to have been perennially present in Greek tradition, especially in the context of casting erotic spells.' (Charles Stewart, *Demons and the Devil: Moral Imagination in Modern Greek Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) p. 231).

²² For the use of curse tablets to inhibit an opponent speaking in court, see Dickie, *Magic & Magicians*, p 17. For other examples of bindings in the Greek magical papyri, see PGM VII. 985, PGM XV. 1, PGM XXXII. 5 and PGM CI. 1.

²³ Faraone, 'The Agnostic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells', p. 5.

However, the use of binding techniques was not restricted to the harm or manipulation of others. Since the world-view that was active in the first centuries associated sickness with demonic influence, many healers considered it necessary to bind the demon responsible for an illness in order to bring about the cure. Therefore binding and loosing are both terms that were closely related to healing in the ancient world.

Binding as a method of healing

Evidence of a correlation between demons and sickness can be found in a variety of biblical and literary sources dating from the second century BC to the first century AD.²⁴ For instance, the Book of Tobit links sickness with demons²⁵ and the appearance of a disease as a demonic figure is described by Philostratus who writes that Apollonius halted the spread of the plague in Ephesus by recognising that the demon responsible was disguised as a beggar and having him stoned.²⁶ The widespread attribution of illness to demonic influences is described by Marvin Meyer who comments in his study of magical texts in the early Christian world:

‘when the precise illness is mentioned, more often than not it is a fever, an eye ailment, or a disease prompted by demon-possession.’²⁷

²⁴ For more on the link between sickness, sin and demons, see H. C. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 55; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) pp. 21-26.

²⁵ For a discussion of the demons in Tobit see G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1973) p. 61.

²⁶ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 4.10; 8.7.

²⁷ M. W. Meyer and R. Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999) p. 29.

With demonic spirits considered to be the source of most illnesses, exorcism was understandably a popular form of healing in the ancient world. The Egyptians considered diseases to be caused by demons which must be exorcised in order to bring about a cure²⁸ and Twelftree incorporates this notion into his 'working definition' of 'exorcism':

'Exorcism was a form of healing used when demons or evil spirits were thought to have entered a person and to be responsible for sickness.'²⁹

When discerning whether this theory of demonic illness applies within the Gospels, John Christopher Thomas advises caution in assuming that *all* illnesses in the Gospels are caused by demons. However, he recognises that demons are typically the source of illness in Luke's Gospel.³⁰ For example, the exorcism of the mute demon in Lk. 11:14 results in the man's ability to speak. Similarly, Jesus rebukes a fever in order to cure Simon's mother-in-law in Lk. 4:38 and since the address is directed to the fever rather the woman and the term ἐπιτιμάω has previously been used as a command to control demons (Lk. 4:35), we can safely assume that the author of Luke intended this healing to be understood as an exorcism.³¹ Furthermore, the link between being 'bound' by Satan and a resulting illness is made explicit in Luke's account of the healing of a woman with a spirit of infirmity in which Jesus asks 'ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham,

²⁸ See R. K. Ritner, 'Innovations and Adaptations in Ancient Egyptian Medicine', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (2000) pp. 107-117.

²⁹ G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) p. 13.

³⁰ J. C. Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought*, JPT 13 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) p. 130.

³¹ Thomas disagrees and argues that this passage cannot be describing an exorcism as the woman does not exhibit signs of demon possession. He prefers to suggest that the woman is suffering from 'demonic physical oppression' (J. C. Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance*, pp. 200 -201).

whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond (λυθῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ δεσμοῦ) on the Sabbath day?’ (Lk. 13:16). In addition to these accounts, the loosing of the bound tongue in the story of the healing of the deaf man in Mk. 7:31-35 is considered to be a typical example of ancient binding magic. Adolf Deissmann claims that Mark’s ὁ δεσμὸς τῆς γλώσσης is a technical expression that has its parallels in the magical tradition and that the bond of the tongue must be loosed in order for the man to speak.³² Loosing, as a method of healing, was often considered to be equally as important as binding the demons causing the illness, as Morton Smith comments:

‘a cure may be described as ‘the bond’ of a disease being ‘loosed’. A helpful magician like Jesus will not only ‘loose’ spells, afflicted persons...but will also ‘bind’ the demons.’³³

Some commentators have suggested that this healing resembles an exorcism due to its inclusion of ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ terminology.³⁴ Although not referring directly to this passage in Mark’s Gospel, Naomi Janowitz considers the actions of ‘looking upwards, sighing or groaning, making hand gestures...spitting, invoking the deity and speaking ‘nonsense’ words or letter strings’) to be typical of exorcistic behaviour, thereby suggesting that we should understand this healing as an exorcism.³⁵

³² Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, trans. R. M. Strachan (London: 1927) p. 306ff.

³³ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 127.

³⁴ Richard Hiers states that the passage ‘bears traces of an exorcism narrative’ (Richard H. Hiers, ‘Binding’ and ‘Loosing: The Matthean Authorizations’, *JBL* 104. 2. (1985) p. 238)

³⁵ N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 39.

While binding demons in order to cast them out from the sick was a common practice in the ancient world and the Gospel writers present Jesus engaging in exorcistic cures, the Pharisees' charge in Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15 is not simply one of *binding* Beelzebul but of *possessing* Beelzebul. As we have previously considered, the close association between exorcism and magic in antiquity almost guarantees that some shrewd observers of Jesus' exorcisms would have assumed that if Jesus was able to effectively command demons and exorcise them, then he could also be in possession of a demon through which he could perform magic. If Jesus' subsequent response to the Pharisees' charge of magic had been simply to refute this suggestion, then the allegation could be dismissed as a malicious attack from Jesus' opponents. However, by using terminology which reveals Jesus' knowledge of magical methods used to bind spirits, including demonic powers, the Gospel authors situate evidence of magical demonic manipulation in the words of Jesus himself.

'How can Satan cast out Satan?' The magical use of bound demons in exorcism

I would suggest that it is within this tradition of 'binding' and 'loosing' demonic beings that we are to interpret Jesus' binding of the 'strong man' in Mk. 3:27//Mt. 12:29. By asking 'how can Satan cast out Satan?' (Mk. 3:23) and using the imagery of the divided kingdom (Mt. 12:25-26//Mk. 3:24-26//Lk. 11:17-18), Jesus ridicules the Pharisees' claim that he is using Beelzebul to perform his exorcisms and suggests that their allegation is nonsensical. However, in accordance with the theories of ancient magic, this possibility would be entirely plausible.

In Mk. 3:27//Mt. 12:29 Jesus states that Satan/Beelzebul³⁶ has been bound (δῆσθῃ) and therefore he cannot prevent Jesus from plundering his οἶκος ('house') for τὰ σκεύη ('goods').³⁷ The σκεύη in this case are commonly considered to be the souls of the demon-possessed³⁸ and the οἶκος is either representative of Satan's kingdom, the present age³⁹ or, most traditionally, the body of the demon-possessed individual.⁴⁰ However, an alternative reading of the terminology in this passage not only draws out implications that Jesus has possession of Satan, but also that he has possession of his demons. In Mark's version, the close correlation between 'kingdom' and 'house' in the division imagery of verses 24-26 leads the reader to assume that these are locations, spiritual or corporal, that belong to Satan. By following immediately into the image of the strong man's house, it is logical to assume that the house in 3:27 is that which belongs to Satan in 3:25. In support of this, the use of the name 'Beelzebul' by the Pharisees instead of 'Satan' in all three Synoptic Gospels is probably intended as a play on the words בעל ('lord') and זבל ('dwelling, or

³⁶ I say 'Satan/Beelzebul' here because Jesus immediately responds to the charge of using Beelzebul (Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15) by saying 'how can Satan cast out Satan?' (Mk. 3:23), thereby implying that they are to be understood as the same individual.

³⁷ We are not told when or how the binding happened, although it is assumed by many that it took place at the temptation. For example, Ernest Best proposes that 'Christ has already bound Satan according to Mark 3:27, δῆσθῃ, aorist subjunctive, would suggest one definite act, and this must be...the Temptation' (Ernest Best, *The Temptation and The Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (SNTSMS 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) p. 13).

³⁸ Cf. Fenton: 'The *strong man* in this parable is Satan, and *his goods* are the people possessed by demons' (J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) p. 198).

³⁹ George E. Ladd gives the following interpretation: 'Satan is a strong man. His palace or house is 'this present evil age' (Gal. 1:4), and his 'goods' are men and women under his evil influence' (G. E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974 (1984 edition), p. 151).

⁴⁰ Cf. Mt. 12:44//Lk. 11:24 in which the demon returns εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου ('into my house). Clearly this is the body of the possessed human in this instance.

house') which combine to read 'lord of the house' (cf. also Mt. 10:25 in which Beelzebul is the master of the house).⁴¹ If the οἶκος in Mk. 3:27//Mt. 12:29 is synonymous with the kingdom of Satan, then the goods of the house would naturally be the demons that are under his command. Therefore, with their chief demon in a 'bound' state, Jesus claims that he can enter this kingdom and steal the demons as Satan is now unable to prevent them from being stolen, hence perhaps the 'gathering' terminology in Mt. 12:30//Lk. 11:23. In order to correct such a reading, the author of Matthew retains the image of a house, the metaphor of burglary and the use of the term δῆσῃ (Mt. 12:29), but separates them from Jesus' comments on the kingdom of Satan (Mt. 12:25) by adding an additional verse questioning the power-source of the Jewish exorcists and an observation that the πνεύματι θεοῦ ('Spirit of God') is the source of Jesus' exorcistic powers (Mt. 12:27-28). The author of Luke includes a similar passage detailing Jesus' power-source, however he states that the δακτύλῳ θεοῦ is at work in Jesus' exorcisms (Lk. 11:20) and chooses to draw his analogy from a battle, using νικάω ('conquer' or 'prevail') rather than use explicit binding terminology (Lk. 11:21-22).⁴² In addition, the author of Luke distances Jesus' words further from this alternative interpretation by replacing the house of Beelzebul with a palace and clearly stating that the 'house' of the demon is the body of the possessed individual (Lk. 11:24-26). Regardless of whether the σκεύη are to be interpreted as the demons of Satan or the souls of the possessed, given that this passage

⁴¹ For a discussion of the name 'Beelzebul', see W. E. M. Aitken, 'Beelzebul', *JBL* 31. No. 1 (1912) p. 34-53. Aitken, however, argues that 'Beelzebul' should be interpreted as 'Lord of heaven' (p. 43).

⁴² The tension between the Lukan phrase δακτύλῳ θεοῦ and Matthew's πνεύμα will be addressed later in Chapter VIII. However this is not the only occasion in which the author of Luke has removed the word 'bind'. For example, the reference to Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18 has been carefully edited to remove the words 'bind up the brokenhearted'.

follows immediately from a charge of magic it is very foolish of the Gospel authors to have Jesus respond to this allegation by demonstrating his knowledge of methods used to control demons. Not only does Jesus' response imply that he has control over Beelzebul, but he also uses terminology that very clearly would have carried implications of magical spirit manipulation in the Jewish culture of the first century.

Both sacred and secular accounts of demonic binding in antiquity reveal that a bound demon is considered to be at the mercy of the one controlling it and it can therefore be expelled from the body of the possessed or compelled to carry out the wishes of the exorcist, even driving out demons on the exorcist's behalf.⁴³ The extensive tradition surrounding the exorcistic prowess of Solomon in the *Testament of Solomon* testifies to this conviction, since he was commonly thought to have had control over a demon that in turn had control over many others.⁴⁴ In addition, Morton Smith comments:

“to drive out a demon by another” was proverbial and the philosopher Porphyry praised the god Serapis (the Greek god Pluto) as “the ruler of the demons who gives spells for their expulsion.”⁴⁵

Consequently, binding formulas were also associated with magicians who used them as a method of gaining the compliance of larger demonic figures, such as Satan himself, who would command the lesser demons to assist the magician with his incantations and magical rituals. The use of bound demons in medieval ritual magic is illustrated by

⁴³ The binding of Azazel in 1 Enoch 10:4-6 is an example of the binding of a demonic leader-figure as the first stage in the defeat of the subordinate demons.

⁴⁴ The *Testament of Solomon* states that Solomon was able to set his demon to work on building his temple (11f).

⁴⁵ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 109. The Porphyry quotation is from Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, IV. 23. I (see Smith, p. 196).

Richard Kieckhefer who observes in his study of the medieval necromantic text known as the Munich handbook that there are numerous conjurations to control demons 'by the rulers of the demons'.⁴⁶ Kieckhefer points out that one invocation in this text requires the magician to invoke a demon 'by all your princes, kings, lords and superiors, and by your hell, and by all those things that exist in it' and another reads: 'by the name of your highest prince'.⁴⁷

In order to silence all speculative accusations and shift the focus away from the figure of Beelzebul, Jesus ultimately identifies the power through which he accomplishes his 'bindings' as the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 12:10). Although the full implications of Jesus' words regarding the Holy Spirit in this passage will be addressed later in Chapter VIII, the presence of a divine spirit here does not automatically exclude the possibility that it is a demonic spirit that is the principal executor of the exorcism. Indeed, the presence of the Holy Spirit when binding demons may well be indicative of magic in itself. Since demons were often bound using the influence of a higher, divine power, the Holy Spirit may be identified in this passage as the power through which Jesus gains the authority to bind Beelzebul. For example, Claire Fanger in her study of demonic magic notes:

'Demonic magic normally involves a ritual process whereby demons are forced to obey the request of the operator after being summoned and bound, not strictly by the operator's own powers, but by calling upon superior spiritual entities (angels, Christ or God).'⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997) p. 138.

⁴⁷ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, pp. 138-9.

⁴⁸ Claire Fanger, (ed.) *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998) p. viii.

The magical employment of one spiritual power against another is acknowledged by Joel B. Green, who suggests that a magician would have been recognised as ‘one who invokes the aid of one spirit(s) against another spirit’.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the employment of a higher, benevolent power when binding demons was often emphasised by magicians in the ancient world in an attempt to acquit themselves from a charge of demonic magic. For example, Kieckhefer comments:

‘while their critics and judges saw the necromancers as in league with the demons, they perceived themselves as calling upon God to help them control and exploit the spirits.’⁵⁰

If we can concede that the power source behind Jesus’ exorcisms is not Beelzebul but the Holy Spirit on the strength of Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 12:10 alone, then suspicions remain concerning other passages in the Gospel of Matthew (specifically Mt. 16:19 and 18:18) in which the terminology used by the evangelist carries strong implications of magical spirit-binding.

On earth as it is in heaven: binding and sympathetic magic

In Mt 16:19 and 18:18, the disciples are told ‘whatever you bind (δῆσῃς) on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose (λύσῃς) on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ The author of Matthew is not clear on the meaning of these terms and this has led to some

⁴⁹ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997) p. 453. Furthermore, Mircea Eliade remarks that the shaman corrects problems caused by spirits by employing other spirits to combat them. (M. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) p. 107).

⁵⁰ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, p. 157.

considerable scholarly confusion regarding the purpose of this passage.⁵¹ Some have suggested that the authority to 'bind' and 'loose' that is granted to the disciples is the power is to make important doctrinal judgments, to determine which actions are forbidden or permitted, or even to absolve or punish sins.⁵²

I would suggest that the binding and loosing terminology in this passage is to be understood in the same context as the binding of the strong man in Mk. 3:27//Mt. 12:29. Therefore the phrasing of Mt. 16:19 and 18:18 is not purely that of apocalyptic symbolism but it constitutes an appeal to the theory of sympathetic magic and is thereby a further indication of Jesus' extensive knowledge of binding techniques. That the ability to 'bind' and 'loose' in Mt. 16:19 and 18:18 refers explicitly to magical spirit manipulation is confirmed by the observation that the ἐξουσία given to the disciples includes the ability to control demons, hence Jesus' warning to the seventy (two) in Lk. 10:20: 'do not rejoice in this *that the spirits are subject to you*, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven' (my emphasis). Some scholars, such as Buchsel, are keen to dismiss the theory that Jesus teaches Peter and the disciples the magical technique of binding or loosing⁵³, however with its appeal to the theory of sympathetic magic and

⁵¹ See R. H. Hiers, 'Binding' and 'Loosing: The Matthean Authorizations' *JBL* 104. 2 (1985) p. 246. Also Günther Bornkamm, 'The Authority to 'Bind' and 'Loose' in the Church in Matthew's Gospel: The Problem of Sources in Matthew's Gospel' in Graham Stanton (ed.) *The Interpretation of Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1983) pp. 85-97.

⁵² Ulrich Luz understands these terms as the authority 'to make decisions of doctrine and to forgive or condemn sins' (Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 106). Similarly, Rudolf Bultmann states that in Mt. 16:18-19 'Peter is promised authority in matters of doctrine or discipline' (R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) p. 138).

⁵³ F. Buchsel, 'Binding and Loosing', *TDNT*, vol. 2, p. 60.

explicit use of binding terminology, I would suggest that these two passages are to be understood as an instruction to the disciples regarding the manipulation of spirits in the ancient world.

Although evidence of Jesus' knowledge of binding techniques alone does not sufficiently warrant a charge of magic, reports of the *application* of these techniques would be unquestionably incriminating. I would suggest that the Gospel writers provide the reader with evidence that Jesus was actively using magical binding techniques in their descriptions of his exorcism of the Demoniac in the Capernaum Synagogue (Mk. 1:21-28//Lk. 4:31-37) and the Gerasene Demoniac (Mk. 5:1-20//Mt. 8:28-34//Lk. 8:26-39).

Binding 'in action': magical exorcism and the struggle for preternatural control between Jesus and demoniac in Mk. 1:21-28 and 5:1-20

When defending against the possibility that magical procedures were used by Jesus in his exorcisms, some scholars point to an absence of Solomonic techniques such as roots, rings and lengthy invocations and prefer instead to emphasise Jesus' messianic authority as the effective element when casting out demons.⁵⁴ However, as we have previously established when considering the techniques of natural magic in Chapter IV, ancient magic did not necessarily rely on physical rituals alone but often simply employed words or spoken formulae. With this in mind, although physical techniques are largely absent in the exorcism accounts, some scholars, such as David Aune, consider Jesus' spoken

⁵⁴ See Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer* (London: SCM Press, 1995) esp. p. 91f.

exorcistic commands to be ‘formulas of magical adjuration’⁵⁵ and John Hull maintains that ‘the general technique of exorcism in Mark’s gospel is that of magical exorcism’.⁵⁶ Examples of this type of magical exorcism can be found in Mk. 1:21-28 and 5:1-20. In both of these exorcism accounts, Jesus and the possessing spirits are engaged in an intense struggle in which each opponent is attempting to gain the upper hand by using a series of spoken magical apotropaic formulas to overpower the other. The author’s attention to detail regarding the techniques employed by Jesus in order to defend himself and gain authority over the attacking demon within these passages reveals parallels relating not only to magical exorcism, but also to binding methods frequently used by magicians when controlling spirits.

The Demoniac in the Capernaum Synagogue (Mk. 1:21-28//Lk. 4:31-37)

In response to the demoniac’s attempt to overpower him in Mk. 1:24, Jesus rebukes the demon (ἐπετίμησεν αὐτῷ) and cries out to it: φημώθητι και ἔξελθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ (Mk. 1:25). The Greek term ἐπιτιμάω, commonly translated as ‘rebuke’⁵⁷, often appears in Mark’s Gospel when someone or something is being silenced (cf. Mk. 1:25, 3:11, 4:39, 8:30, 10:13 and 10:48) and Howard Clark Kee suggests that רָצַף, the Hebrew equivalent for

⁵⁵ David Aune, ‘Magic in Early Christianity’ *ANRW* II. 23. 2 (1980) p. 1532.

⁵⁶ John Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 68.

⁵⁷ Arndt and Gingrich translate ἐπιτιμάω as ‘rebuke, reprove, censure’ (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) p. 303.

this term, ‘conveys the sense of bringing under control a hostile force’.⁵⁸ Although the presence of ἐπιτιμάω in this passage does not carry any obvious magical connotations, the evangelist’s choice of φιμώθητι (‘be silent’) rather than σιώπα (‘be quiet’, cf. Mk. 10:48) is particularly significant since this word has a strong magical resonance. The term φιμώθητι appears frequently throughout the magical papyri and carries the sense of binding or restricting. For example, Graham Twelftree comments that the word φιμοῦν is ‘strongly related to “incantational restriction”, rather than to “talking”’.⁵⁹ Twelftree concludes that ‘the use of φιμώθητι puts someone in a position where they are unable to operate (cf. Mt. 22:34).’⁶⁰ The use of a silencing command as a binding formula to restrict the activities of a spirit is common in the Greek magical papyri. For example, in the Mithras Liturgy (PGM IV. 475-829) the magician is instructed as follows:

‘And you will see the gods staring intently at you and rushing at you.
So at once put your right finger on your mouth and say: ‘Silence!
Silence! Silence! (σιγή, σιγή, σιγή) Symbol of the living, incorruptible
god! Guard me, Silence (σιγή), NECHTHEIR THANMELOU!’
(PGM IV. 555-560)⁶¹

In view of the widespread use of the silencing formula as a magical binding technique, it is highly probable that the command φιμώθητι καὶ ἔξελθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ in Mk. 1:25 is not simply intended to quieten the demon in order to prevent it from making a public

⁵⁸ H. C. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 55; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 24. cf. H. C. Kee, ‘The Terminology of Mark’s Exorcism Stories’, *NTS* 14 (1967-8) p. 235. A. A. Mackintosh observes that the term נָפַח seems to denote furious anger and ‘indicates the convulsing of the throat which effects a lowing, bellowing sound’ (A. A. Macintosh, ‘A Consideration of Hebrew g’r’, *VT* 19 (Oct, 1969) p. 473).

⁵⁹ Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 69. Jesus uses same address to the sea in Mk. 4:39.

⁶¹ See PGM IV.555-560 and 575-585 for three more occurrences of ‘Silence! Silence!’.

declaration of Jesus' messianic identity, but it is also a defensive binding technique employed by Jesus to restrain the demon from continuing its attempts to manipulate him.⁶² However, the presence of a silencing formula in this passage is not the only instance of a binding technique in Jesus' exorcisms. The short and apparently innocuous question 'what is your name?' in Mk. 5:9//Lk. 8:30 demonstrates Jesus' knowledge of another well-documented magical binding device; the use of the name.

The Gerasene Demoniac (Mk. 5:1-20//Mt. 8:28-34//Lk. 8:26-39)

We have previously observed in Chapter III that the knowledge of the name of a god or person was essential when seeking to gain control over a spiritual or human foe in order to restrain them and force them to comply with the magician's own bidding.⁶³ The technique of finding out the secret identity of a demon in order to achieve its expulsion has been extensively documented throughout history.⁶⁴ For example, in *The Testament of*

⁶² For a discussion of the magical defensive techniques used by this demon to manipulate Jesus, see Chapter III.

⁶³ For example, Kaster comments: 'whoever knows the god's real name, secret and ineffable and taboo, has control over him... when he is evoked by his real name, he must work the desire of the magician who 'controls' him' (Joseph Kaster, (trans. and ed.), *The Wings of the Falcon* (New York: 1968) p. 60).

⁶⁴ Morton Smith states that 'anyone who wanted to subdue that spirit (as did those who wanted to put him under restraint) would want to find out its name, or at least its title. It was thought that demons, like dogs, would obey if you called them by their names' (M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 33). See also Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, pp. 68-69 and D. Ogden *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) p. 115, also Lucian: 'he...asks: 'How did you come into this body?' the patient himself is silent, but the spirit answers in Greek or in the language of whatever foreign country he comes from telling how and whence he entered into the man; whereupon, by adjuring the spirit and if he does not obey, threatening him, he drives him out' (Lucian, *The Lover of Lies*, 16).

Solomon, Solomon asks a demon ‘by what name are you and your demons thwarted?’ to which the demon answers: ‘If I tell you his name, I place not only myself in chains, but also the legion of demons under me’ (11:6). Although the inclusion of ‘legion’ in this instance suggests a dependence on Mk. 5:9, this passage underlines the ancient belief that the possession of the demon’s name was essential when controlling demonic powers. In addition, the magical use of the name appears throughout the Greek magical papyri. In PGM I. 160-161 the magician demands ‘what is your divine name? Reveal it to me ungrudgingly, so that I may call upon it’ and in PGM IV. 3038 the magician commands: ‘I conjure you, every daimonic spirit, to tell whatever sort you may be.’

Since any magician involved in the manipulation of the spirits of the demonic or the dead would be well practiced at this particular binding procedure, its appearance in Mk. 5:9//Lk. 8:30 is highly suspect. The question τί ὄνομά σοι; (‘what is your name?’) has even forced many scholars who are reluctant to concede that magical techniques are present in Jesus’ behaviour, such as Steven Davies, to conclude that Jesus ‘may well have asked demon’s names’.⁶⁵ It is difficult to understand why Jesus’ question to the demoniac has been preserved by the evangelists as it not only suggests that Jesus’ knowledge of the demon is limited but the early reader may well have been aware of the magical implications of this technique and consequently applied a magical interpretation to Jesus’

⁶⁵ Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, p. 92. Graham Twelftree states, in relation to Jesus’ question to the demoniac in Mk. 5:9, that ‘the history of religions parallels make it obvious that the name was part of the form of the prescription used in preternatural control’ (Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 61). Similarly, Deissmann believes by asking for the demon’s name, Jesus is attempting ‘to obtain complete power over the daemon’ (A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 261).

exorcism. If the question is retained in the Markan and Lukan versions since it was required in order to reveal the name of the demon, then we may well ask what other equally dubious techniques have been omitted from the exorcism accounts when they were deemed by the redactors to be superfluous or to carry connotations of magical behaviour.

That the author of Matthew was aware of magical connotations in this pericope is suggested by his drastic alteration of the Markan version. He appears to have omitted all signs of a struggle between Jesus and the demon and the two opposing sides have very little interaction. While the author of Mark states that the demoniac κράζας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ (Mk. 5:7), the author of Matthew tones this down to ἔκραξαν, thereby softening the severity of the demon's aggression (Mt. 8:29). In addition, there is no indication in the Matthean version that the demons have ignored Jesus' first command for them to leave and Jesus' request for the name, and consequently the name 'Legion', are also omitted. Since the author of Matthew's Gospel is often keen to lay emphasis upon Jesus' messianic authority and word, he may have chosen to present a Jesus who has no use of exorcistic technique. However, since Jesus' request for the name of the demon is clearly indicative of magic, the author of Matthew may also have felt compelled to remove this particular indication of a magical technique at work in Jesus' exorcisms. Furthermore, the omission of the initial failed exorcistic attempt may also have been necessary to remove the possibility that Jesus had to reapply his exorcistic words, especially since the

reapplication of techniques has previously been established as a hallmark of ancient magic.⁶⁶

Having taken great care to remove elements from the Markan version that he considered to be particularly suspicious, the author of Matthew's insertion of the exorcistic command 'go' (ὑπάγετε, 8:32) is surprising. Although it is highly likely that an exorcistic word, phrase or gesture would have been given at this point in Jesus' exorcism, the Markan and Lukan accounts do not include a word of command by which the demons are transferred into the pigs, they simply state 'he gave them leave' (ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτοῖς, Mk. 5:13//Lk. 8:32).⁶⁷ The christological objectives of the author of Matthew could account for this emphasis on Jesus' authoritative word of expulsion, particularly if this passage was considered to provide a demonstration of Jesus' messianic authority. If this is the case, then this may well account for why the story of the Gerasene demoniac is preserved in Matthew and yet other exorcisms, such as the Capernaum exorcism, are omitted. However, if the author of Matthew was excluding magical techniques from his Gospel then he may have made a glaring oversight in this instance since this command of expulsion appears frequently in rites of magical exorcism. For example, Roy Kotansky describes a lead tablet from Phalasarna in Crete that is dated to the 4th or early 3rd century BC and contains 'a magical incantation for banishing demons'.⁶⁸ Kotansky observes that

⁶⁶ For the repetition of technique as a major indicator of magical practice, see Chapter II.

⁶⁷ Morton Smith compares Mk. 5:13 to PGM LXI. 10: 'I release you against her' (ἀπολύω σε πρὸς τὴν δεῖνα) (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 110).

⁶⁸ R. Kotansky, 'Greek Exorcistic Amulets' in M. W. Meyer and P. Mirecki (eds.) *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) p. 254.

the incantation wards off the demons by commanding them to flee (φεύγε) and he concludes:

‘this stratagem of expulsion is widely found in late antique magic spells, particularly in exorcisms, but can also be used of banishing diseases and ailments in general – themselves the manifestation of demonic activity.’⁶⁹

In addition to the suspicious presence of a binding technique and a flee formula within the Synoptic accounts of the Gerasene exorcism, the transfer of demons into pigs also has its parallels in the ancient magical tradition. Although some scholars believe that the pigs have a symbolic purpose in this passage⁷⁰, the transfer of evil into objects, particularly animals, was a common method of exorcism in the ancient world.⁷¹ This procedure is demonstrated by the Assyrian exorcists who would drive a goat carrying a person’s illness into the wilderness where it would be slaughtered.⁷² Similarly, in Babylonia, demons were cast into water which was then transferred into a container. The container was broken and the water was poured on the ground, thereby destroying the demon.⁷³ More specifically, for comparative purposes with Mk. 5:11-13//Mt. 8:32//Lk. 8:32-33, a Sumerian text dating back to the second millennium BC describes how a demon that is responsible for an illness is transferred to a pig and the pig is subsequently sacrificed in

⁶⁹ Kotansky, ‘Greek Exorcistic Amulets’, p. 254.

⁷⁰ Jean Starobinski believes that the fall of the pigs is symbolic of the fall of the rebellious angels from heaven (J. Starobinski, ‘The Struggle with Legion: A Literary Analysis of Mark 5: 1-20’, *New Literary History* 4. 2 (1973), p. 339).

⁷¹ Pliny asserted a belief in the transfer of evil into objects (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 28.86).

⁷² See James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Chapter 56.

⁷³ See R. C. Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylon*, vol. 2 (London: Luzac, 1904) p. 35.

order to effect a cure:

[Take] a piglet [...],
[Place it] at the head of the patient,
Tear out its heart (and)
[Put it] on the upper part of the body of the patient,
[Sprinkle] its blood around his bed,
Dismember the piglet to correspond to his limbs,
Spread them (the limbs of the piglet) on the sick man....
...Give the piglet as his substitute,
Give the flesh for his flesh, the blood for his blood –
May (the demon) accept it!
The heart which you placed on his heart, you offer instead of his heart –
May (the demon) accept it! ⁷⁴



Having observed first-hand Jesus' domineering authority when in dialogue with demonic beings, the Pharisees reasonably assume that a man who commands demons can also make them work for him. Consequently, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of possessing Beelzebul and using him as a powerful tool by which he executes his miracles (Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15). When considering Jesus' exorcistic behaviour in the context of early belief systems that were active in the cultural milieu of the first century, it is clear that the allegation made by the Pharisees would have been considered by many people to be an entirely sensible rationalisation of Jesus' activities. As a result, an accusation of demonic influence could well have been made against Jesus at some point

⁷⁴ Translation by Frederick H. Cryer & Marie-Louise Thomsen, *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Biblical and Pagan Societies*, vol. 1 (London: the Athlone Press, 2001) p. 71. For text, see R. C. Thompson, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, vol. 17 (London, 1903) pl. 5-6: II. 43 – III. 18 and for a translation of the whole text see Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylon*, pp. 13-25.

in his ministry and these rumours may have been the impetus for the Gospel authors to address this allegation directly in this passage. However, although Jesus ridicules this possibility and claims that his power derives from the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 12:10), instead of seizing the opportunity to acquit Jesus of charges of demon possession, the Gospel writers have Jesus elaborate on how it is necessary to 'bind' Beelzebul and gain control over him in order to free the possessed from their ordeal. Not being satisfied by suggesting demonic manipulation in this passage alone, the Gospel authors also portray Jesus as employing 'binding and loosing' terminology and demonstrating his knowledge of the magical laws of sympathy elsewhere in the Gospels (Mt. 16:19, 18:18). Furthermore, the Gospel writers suggest that Jesus was extremely knowledgeable regarding magical methods used to manipulate spirits and entirely competent when applying binding techniques such as silencing formulas and the request for a name. As these binding techniques are employed successfully and Jesus boasts of his ability to bind demons, then for his opponents to make the supplementary claim that these demons are being employed in his service is entirely understandable, if not credible. Nevertheless, if we can dispense with the possibility that Jesus was manipulating demonic spirits on the basis that his power-source is ultimately revealed to be the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:31//Mk. 3:29//Lk. 12:10), the fact that Jesus appears to competently employ these magical binding techniques throughout the Gospels will suffice to demonstrate that he is far from ignorant of magical devices used to manipulate spirits and entirely capable of their successful application.

CHAPTER VII

A CHARGE OF NECROMANCY? JESUS' IDENTIFICATION WITH JOHN THE BAPTIST IN MK. 6:14-29//MT. 14:1-12//LK. 9:7-9

'A certain female juggler had died, but a magician of the band put a charm under her arm-pits, which gave her power to move; but another wizard having looked at her, cried out that it was only vile carrion, and immediately she fell down dead, and appeared what she was in fact.'

~ Dom Augustine Calmet, *Treatise on Vampires and Revenants* [1850], XXXV ~

When Herod receives news of the miracles performed by Jesus, his immediate response is that John the Baptist has been raised from the dead and Jesus is able to perform miracles as a direct result (Mk. 6:14-29//Mt. 14:2). Although Herod is aware that debates are raging amongst the people concerning the true identity of Jesus and alternative candidates have been proposed ('Elijah' or 'one of the prophets', Mk. 6:15//Lk. 9:7-8), he remains steadfastly convinced that Jesus is to be identified with the post-mortem John. That Jesus himself was privately aware of these rumours is indicated by his question to the disciples 'who do men say I am?' in Mk. 8:27//Mt. 16:13//Lk. 9:18 and once again the three names of John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets are recounted (Mk. 8:28//Mt. 16:14//Lk. 9:19).

New Testament scholarship is remarkably silent concerning this seemingly widespread confusion regarding Jesus' identity. Since these three proposed alter-identities appear on two separate occasions and take their sources from the general populace rather than from

the malicious charges brought by Jesus' opponents, it is fair to assume that the Gospel authors recognised that these rumours were commonplace amongst Jesus' contemporaries or that they constituted popular elements of stories that arose following his death.¹ If so, the evangelists may have felt obliged to mention this speculation concerning Jesus' true identity regardless of the damage that it may do to the messianic identity of Jesus. The identification of Jesus with Elijah may be related to the mishearing of the last words spoken by Jesus on the cross in Mk. 15:35//Mt. 27:47.² However, Herod's correlation between Jesus and John the Baptist is a little more problematic. It is unlikely that Herod is referring to the concept of reincarnation since John the Baptist and Jesus existed contemporaneously and they are distinctly separate characters in the Gospels. So how it is that Herod understands the relationship between Jesus and the post-mortem John? And why would Herod assume that John was empowering Jesus to perform miracles?

In an attempt to answer these questions, Stephen Davies applies his spirit-possession model to this passage and suggests that Jesus was *possessed* by John and therefore Jesus was to be identified as John when under John's influence.³ Similar spirit-possession theories are recorded by Origen who states that in the early Christian community it was

¹ An echo of this is found in the Slavonic additions to Josephus' *Jewish War* in which we read: 'some said of him, 'our first lawgiver is risen from the dead, and hath evidenced this by many cures and prodigies.''

² The confusion regarding Jesus' words on the cross will be addressed later in Chapter VIII.

³ 'By the logic of possession, then, if Jesus received John's spirit he had therefore become possessed by John and so sometimes had John's identity. Or, if possessed by Elijah's spirit, he therefore sometimes had Elijah's identity' (Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance and the Origins of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1995) p. 95).

believed that through the possession of the same spirit, John the Baptist *was* Elijah and Jesus *was* John the Baptist. Therefore, Origen suggests that we are to understand Herod's reasoning as 'Jesus was possessed of the same powers which formerly wrought in John.'⁴ Unfortunately, rationalising this Jesus-John relationship in terms of spirit-possession is inadequate since Herod's accusation is not that Jesus is being influenced or possessed by John, but that John 'has been raised from the dead' (Mk. 6:14//Mt. 14:2). When re-examining this statement in the context of belief systems and superstitions concerning the violently and untimely dead in the ancient world, it becomes apparent that the modern reader, approaching the Gospels with a westernised and sanitised approach to customs surrounding the dead, may well neglect the underlying fears and anxieties that would have been brooding in Herod's statement for the early reader. I would therefore suggest that the allegation, in the strictest sense, is that an external force has acted upon the body and/or soul of John to raise him from the dead and that John's possessor (Jesus) is able to manipulate the post-mortem John to produce miraculous effects.

The manipulation of the spirits of the dead for magical purposes was known in antiquity as 'necromancy', from the Greek νεκρός ('corpse') and μαντεία ('divination'). This term was often used to refer to the physical resurrection of a corpse or the re-animation of dismembered body parts using magical procedures, although it was also broadly applied to the practice of consulting the spirits of the dead regarding future events. This latter type of 'spiritual' necromancy was occasionally distinguished from the practice of bodily

⁴ Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 10:20. Morton Smith points out that there was a period of time when Simon Magus was believed to 'be' Jesus until his real methods were discovered (Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978) p. 34).

reanimation by the variant term ‘sciomancy’, from the Greek σκιά (‘shadow’) and μαντεία (‘divination’).⁵ The prevalence of divinatory practices using the dead in the ancient biblical world is exemplified by the inclusion of laws forbidding such practices alongside the prohibitions against magic in the Old Testament. For example, Lev. 19:26 states ‘you shall not practice augury⁶ or witchcraft’ and Deut. 18:10-11 explicitly forbids divination (חֲדָשׁ), auguries (חֲזָוִי) and consultation of the dead. The most infamous biblical example of this particular type of necromantic divination is the consultation of Samuel performed by the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28.⁷

When the spirits of the dead were not being summoned to return to their corpses in order to reanimate it or harassed by magicians curious about future events, they were subjected to attempts by magicians to acquire them as familiar spirits who would work under the authority of the magician and perform supernatural acts whenever the magician so requires. We must therefore be aware that in addition to necromantic and sciomantic activity, many magicians in antiquity were actively seeking to gain possession of the dead as powerful assisting spirits.

⁵ This process would typically involve the conjuration of a spirit in a ghost-like form or the controlled possession of the magician by the invoked spirit (for induced possession as a method of magical prophecy, see the use of the חֲזָוִי in Chapter V).

⁶ The Hebrew word חֲזָוִי, here translated as ‘auguries’, generally carries the meaning of ‘divination’ (cf. BDB p. 638).

⁷ For a thorough examination of the necromantic activity in 1 Samuel 28, see Christophe L. Nihan, ‘1 Samuel 28 and the Condemnation of Necromancy in Persian Yehud’ in Todd Klutz (ed.) *Magic in the Biblical world: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, JSNTsup 245 (2003) pp. 23-54. Also Brian B. Schmidt, ‘The ‘Witch’ of En-Dor, 1 Samuel 28, and Ancient Near Eastern Necromancy’ in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.) *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Boston: Brill, 2001) pp. 111 – 129.

By comparing Herod's statement in Mk. 6:14//Mt. 14:2 to these three popular forms of necromantic activity in the ancient world, it is possible to estimate whether these magical procedures may have informed Herod's understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the post-mortem John. Unsurprisingly, the Gospel authors do not present Jesus as engaging in activities which directly involve the raising of John in either a spiritual or corporal form. However, since the practice of necromancy was widespread in antiquity, there is a wealth of literary and magical documents that detail various necromantic rituals and methodologies and it is against this evidence that we can compare the behaviour of Jesus within the Gospels in order to judge whether the evangelists depict him as using techniques that were typically associated with the necromantic manipulation of the spirits of the dead. In order to do this, we will first adopt a literal reading of Mk. 6:14//Mt. 14:2 and ask whether the reader is to understand that Jesus has somehow raised the physical body of John. Second, we will apply a sciomatic interpretation and investigate the possibility that Jesus is accused of consulting the spirit of John through necromantic divination. Finally, we will enquire whether Herod is alleging that Jesus has possession of the spirit of John in the same way that a magician would have possession of a familiar spirit.

Magical reanimation and the corporeal raising of the dead

Corpse reanimation was considered to be a powerful demonstration of a magician's mastery over the spirits of the dead and consequently the practice of raising the dead, particularly for divinatory purposes, is extensively cited in the literature produced by

many cultures throughout history.⁸ The ancient Greeks, for example, claimed to reanimate the heads of those who had been decapitated in order to perform a type of divination known as cephalomancy⁹ and instructions for raising the dead in bodily form often appear in the magical papyri.¹⁰ The physical resurrection of the dead is an ability that is attributed to Jesus by all four Gospel writers. There are two occasions in Mark's Gospel in which Jesus appears to resuscitate the dead; the first is Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5:35-43//Mt. 9:23-26) and the second follows Jesus' exorcism of the epileptic boy (Mk. 9:14-29). On both occasions, the child only appears to be dead and therefore the legitimacy of the resuscitation is questioned ('the child is not dead but sleeping' Mk. 9:39//Mt. 9:24, 'the boy was like a corpse' Mk. 9:26).¹¹ However, since a potentially magical word or phrase is present in both of these passages (see Chapter IV), our suspicions of magical practice should be heightened when considering magical activity in these particular accounts.¹² Conversely, the young man who is raised from the dead in

⁸ For example, in his introduction to the chapter 'Reanimation and Talking Heads', Daniel Ogden states 'the single most striking innovation in the Greco-Roman necromantic tradition is corpse reanimation' (Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) p. 202).

⁹ See Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* p. 202ff.

¹⁰ See PGM XII. 279-283: 'for the resurrection of a dead body'.

¹¹ Regarding the magical resurrection of the dead, Dom Augustine Calmet states: 'The resuscitation of some persons who were believed to be dead, and who were not so, but simply asleep, or in a lethargy; and of those who were supposed to be dead, having been drowned, and who came to life again through the care taken of them, or by medical skill, must not pass for real resuscitations; they were not dead, or were so only in appearance' (Dom Augustine Calmet, *Treatise on Vampires and Revenants: The Phantom World* [1850], trans. Rev. Henry Christmas, ed. Clive Leatherdale (Desert Island, 1993) p. 33).

¹² For example, the *talitha koum* commandment appears in the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5:41) and following the exorcism of epileptic boy, Jesus teaches his disciples that this type of demon 'cannot be driven out by anything but prayer' thereby suggesting to the reader that a specific prayer technique should be used in this case (Mk. 9:29). The implications of both of these magical techniques have previously been discussed in Chapter IV.

Lk. 7:11-17 is being carried out in a σοφόζ ('coffin') when his mother encounters Jesus and we may therefore presume that he has been dead for a considerable period of time.

In the account of the raising of Lazarus we are confronted with the resurrection of a corpse that been dead for four days (Jn. 11:1-46). Although a magical technique is not immediately apparent in the account provided by the author of John, some individuals, such as Tertullian, have desperately attempted to disentangle the raising of Lazarus from the practice of necromancy.¹³ Furthermore, efforts to disassociate this passage from magical activities are seriously impeded by artistic depictions of Jesus in the third and fourth-centuries which portray him as using a wand when performing his miracles, particularly when raising Lazarus. These 'wizard-like' representations of Jesus are so common in the art of this period that Thomas Mathews in his study of early Christian art comments:

'Next to the scroll of his teaching, the wand is the most constant attribute of Christ in Early Christian art, introduced already in the third century.'¹⁴

Jesus is frequently portrayed as raising Lazarus with a wand in the frescoes in the catacombs of Rome. For example, a fresco depicting the raising of Lazarus in the Catacomb of Callixtus in Rome dates to the mid-third century and presents Jesus as holding a long, narrow wand in his left hand with which he touches the head of Lazarus (see Appendix 1, fig. 1., cf. also figs. 2-3). The wand also appears in representations of

¹³ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 53.3.

¹⁴ Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) p. 54.

the feeding miracles (figs. 4, 9) and, as Mathews observes, it is sometimes 'Christianized' by 'putting a little cross on top of it' (figs. 5, 16).¹⁵ In addition to these Roman catacomb frescoes, the image of Jesus raising Lazarus with a wand also appears on many third and fourth century sarcophagi (figs. 6-10). These sarcophagi carvings also present Jesus as using a wand when raising the dead (fig. 11) and raising Jairus' daughter (fig. 12) and a long staff-like instrument appears in one instance when Jesus is healing a blind man (fig. 13). In addition to frescoes and sarcophagi, the image of Jesus with a wand also appears on a fourth-century gilt glass bowl (fig. 15) and two ivory diptychs; one which dates from the sixth century (fig. 16) and the Italian diptych known as the 'Andrews' diptych, which dates from the mid-fifth century (fig. 17).

This curious phenomenon has been overlooked by almost all studies investigating magic in the Gospels and therefore it has not been adequately explained. Although it is tempting to immediately claim that these artistic representations are valuable evidence that Jesus was considered to be a magician, we must first exhaust all other possible interpretations. For instance, is the wand used as a symbol of Jesus' authority? This is highly unlikely as the scroll is employed for that very purpose on many other occasions and the wand does not appear in scenes which emphasise Jesus' authority (see fig. 14).¹⁶ Alternatively, since many modern bible translations mention that 'staffs' are carried by the disciples (Mk. 6:8//Mt. 10:10//Lk. 9:3), could this wand simply be a walking-staff that is used by Jesus?

¹⁵ Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, p. 57.

¹⁶ Robin M. Jensen claims that the wand represents Jesus' magical powers and it is not to be understood as a sign of authority as the scroll is used for this purpose (Robin. M. Jensen, 'Raising Lazarus', *Bible Review* 11.2 (1995), 20-29). See also Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods*, p. 54).

Again this is unlikely as the wands do not appear randomly in scenes of Jesus' life *but only when a miracle is being performed*. In many of these artistic representations the wands make contact with the object that is to be transformed, therefore they do not appear to be a superfluous or decorative element of Jesus' appearance but they clearly have a functional purpose that is directly related to the performance of a miracle. Furthermore, the word commonly translated as 'staff' in Mk. 6:8//Mt. 10:10//Lk. 9:3 is ῥάβδος and F. J. M de Waele states that the use of this term in antiquity almost invariably means 'wand' or 'rod' (i.e. 'a supple and pliant twig') and is distinct from σκήπτρον (a rigid staff).¹⁷ Although staffs were reportedly carried by magicians and gods in the ancient world, such as Hermes' kerukeion-caduceus, De Waele observes that it was often the case, particularly in ancient Rome, that 'the staff was only used as a support for beggars, for the old and the blind'.¹⁸ The ῥάβδος, in contrast, was a flexible twig which would provide no support as a walking-stick and this smaller instrument characterised the archetypal 'magical wand' in antiquity (hence, although Hermes is often depicted carrying his kerukeion-caduceus, it is his ῥάβδος by which he performs his magic¹⁹).

And so we come to ask: did these artists believe that Jesus had used a magical tool when performing his miracles, particularly when raising the dead? An association between wands and magical activity has clearly been made in the art of this period. For example, Peter is identified as a great magician in the *Acts of Peter* and therefore he appears on

¹⁷ F. J. M. de Waele, *The Magic Staff or Rod in Graeco-Italian Antiquity* (Drukkerij Erasmus, 1927) p. 25.

¹⁸ De Waele, *The Magic Staff*, p. 27.

¹⁹ See De Waele, *The Magic Staff*, pp. 29-69.

sarcophagi carvings bearing a wand that is similar to that used by Jesus (fig. 18).²⁰ In addition, Moses is frequently depicted in the catacomb frescoes as using a wand when striking water from the rock and crossing the red sea (figs. 19-21). The book of Exodus states that Moses carried a *מִטָּה* (Exod. 7:8-21; 8:5-6, 16-17), a term which the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* translates as ‘staff, rod, shaft’²¹, however Mathews suggests that this instrument should be understood as having the same function as a wand.²² By depicting Jesus as using a similar type of instrument, these artists obviously intended their audience to understand that Jesus was also a powerful magician. Therefore, in order to fully appreciate the implications of magic that these artists were weaving into the Lazarus story, we must investigate how the wand was believed to function in the ancient world.

The use of the wand in ancient magic

In his comprehensive investigation into the use of wands in antiquity, F. J. M de Waele observes that the wand is a common staple of both ancient and contemporary magic and most figures in primitive or modern societies who act as a mediator between man and the

²⁰ Figure 18 in Appendix A depicts Peter producing water from a rock to baptise his soldiers. Mathews comments: ‘the usual explanation for the choice of this miracle is its baptismal symbolism. But why choose so obscure a baptismal story when there are the solid scriptural accounts...in Acts 8:26-40, 10: 47-48? Clearly it was important to show Peter using his magical wand’ (Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods*, p. 193, n. 68).

²¹ BDB, p. 641.

²² ‘these subjects are ubiquitous in catacomb art and...demonstrate Moses making use of his magic wand’ (Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods*, p. 72).

gods usually carry a magical wand.²³ The Old Testament reveals that Moses and Aaron possessed magical staffs by which they worked their miracles (Exod. 7:8-21; 8:5-6, 16-17) and the use of wands in modern-day conjuring tricks demonstrates that these instruments remain associated with magical wonders in our contemporary culture.

Although the precise use of the wand in the ancient world is uncertain, De Waele suggests that the wand was considered by various cultures to be an extension of the bearer's body and an effective power conductor through which he can transmit energy from himself to another person or object.²⁴ In addition to their efficacy in transferring energy, wands were also valued by the ancient Greeks as conductors of human souls. For example, Aristotle claimed that he had witnessed a man drawing the soul of a sleeping boy out of his body using a 'soul-charming wand' (*psuchoulkos rhabdos*)²⁵ and the Greek god Hermes appears in *The Odyssey* with a golden wand with which he summons the souls of the dead out of their bodies.²⁶ Due to their usefulness in directing energy and manipulating the souls of the living and the dead, wands were frequently employed by

²³ F. J. M. de Waele, *The Magic Staff or Rod in Graeco-Italian Antiquity* (Drukkerij Erasmus, 1927). De Waele notes: 'even as in our days, this ancient object belongs to the equipment of the sorcerer...so it may have been with the *γοητεία*, originally a kind of necromancy, but afterwards generally, only a kind of prestidigitation...in augury and astrology, as well as in many other forms of primitive sorcery, a wand or staff may have been used' (p. 23).

²⁴ De Waele, *The Magic Staff*, p. 165.

²⁵ Clearchus, *On Sleep*, quoted by Proclus in his *Commentary on Plato's Republic* X. For further discussion of this passage, see Hans Lewy, 'Aristotle and the Jewish Sage According to Clearchus of Soli', *HTR* 31.3 (1938) pp. 205-235.

²⁶ Homer, *The Odyssey* 24. For examples of staffs used by gods and goddesses such as Hermes, Dionysos and Asklepios, Athene, Artemis, Nemesis, Rhea, Poseidon, and Apollon, see De Waele, *The Magic Staff*, chapter 1: 'The Magic Staff or Rod in the Hands of the Gods.'

magicians as a necromantic tool and they often appear in representations of necromancy, on gemstones in particular, as a 'plain small rod' which is used by the necromancer to touch the head of the corpse.²⁷ There is no definite consensus to explain why contact between the wand and the head of a corpse was necessary. It is highly unlikely that the necromancer is simply pointing to the corpse, since the precise connection between the head and the point of the wand cannot be coincidental on each occasion. In light of this recurrent wand-head connection, De Waele suggests:

'it is very probable that the wand has something to do with a necromantic action and that it is the usual implement of necromancers or magicians.'²⁸

If the wand was unequivocally linked with necromantic practice in the ancient world, particularly when it was used to touch the head of a corpse, then it is surprising that an artist would consciously depict Jesus using a wand to perform his miracles and it is exceptionally remarkable that they would portray him as touching the top of Lazarus' head with his wand (see Appendix A, figs. 1-3, 7-10, 17, also the raising of Jairus' daughter in fig. 12 and the raising of the dead in fig. 11). The suspicious similarity between the techniques of the necromancers and these depictions of Jesus in early Christian art is indicated by De Waele who comments in a vague footnote:

'I can only suggest here that there may be a possibility of a connexion (sic) between the artistic type of these necromantic gems and the type of Christ, performing the wonder of the resurrection by touching the head of a dead person with a wand.'²⁹

²⁷ For examples of these representations on gems see De Waele, *The Magic Staff*, p. 162.

²⁸ De Waele, *The Magic Staff*, p. 165.

²⁹ De Waele, *The Magic Staff*, p. 165.

We may presume from these artistic representations that certain individuals in the late third and fourth centuries understood that Jesus had employed magical, specifically necromantic, techniques when performing his miracles. Morton Smith briefly touches on this possibility when discussing a representation of Jesus with a wand on a fourth-century glass plate. Smith refers to the artist who produced this work as a member of the 'Christian cult of Jesus the magician' and he adds that this 'cult of Jesus the magician' demonstrates that representations of Jesus employing magical techniques are 'not peculiar to outsiders nor solely the product of malicious interpretation'.³⁰ Smith therefore concludes:

'we have to deal with a tradition that tried to clear Jesus of the charge of magic and also one that revered him as a great magician.'³¹

In addition to the possibility that these artistic works were produced by a specific sect that worshipped and admired Jesus as a magician, Robin M. Jensen proposes that these depictions indicate that the early Church itself may have understood Jesus to be a magician.³²

If these representations indicate that Jesus was suspected of practising necromancy in the centuries following his death, then it is likely that he encountered similar accusations during his lifetime. If so, we could possibly interpret Herod's statement that John 'has been raised from the dead' (Mk. 6:14//Mt. 14:2) in its most literal form as revealing

³⁰ M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 64.

³¹ M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 94.

³² Robin M. Jensen, 'Raising Lazarus', *Bible Review* 11.2 (1995), pp. 20-29.

Herod's fears that Jesus has accomplished the physical reanimation of John's body. Although the Gospel writers indirectly support this interpretation by demonstrating that Jesus was entirely capable of raising the dead in bodily form, Herod's allegation is not simply that Jesus has raised John from the dead, but that John is the source of Jesus' ability to perform miracles. How is the reader to understand Herod's suggestion that the body of the resurrected John is continually transferring power to Jesus? Are we to understand that the newly-revived cadaver of John was accompanying Jesus around Galilee and performing miracles on his behalf? On the contrary, perhaps the Gospel writers did not intend Herod's words to concern the bodily resurrection of John but rather the consultation of his spirit. In this case, the allegation made by Herod could be interpreted as a charge that John's *spirit*, rather than his physical body, is assisting Jesus in his miracles.

Divination with the dead and the use of young boys

Magicians who were actively consulting the dead for divinatory purposes in the ancient world could often be identified by their use of a medium, typically a pure and uncorrupted pre-pubescent boy, who would act as a mediator between the magician and the spirit world. Young boys were specifically selected as mediums since their youth, sexual purity and freedom from physical desires was thought to enhance their perceptual

abilities.³³ In accordance with this opinion, Iamblichus states that the best mediums are those who are straightforward and young³⁴ and Justin Martyr acknowledges the popular use of ‘immaculate children’ in divination rituals.³⁵

The divinatory texts within the Greek magical papyri are crammed with instructions for the use of young, pure boys. For example, a third-century lamp divination (PGM VII. 540-78) states: ‘the boy, then, should be uncorrupt, pure (ὁ δὲ παιῖς ἔστω ἄφθορος, καθαρός)’. The boys’ sexual purity is stressed in ‘a vessel divination’ (PDM XIV. 1-92) in which the magician is advised: ‘you should bring a pure youth who has not yet gone with a woman’ (XIV. 68). The popularity of boy mediums in antiquity was so widespread that in one text entitled ‘a vessel divination’ (PDM XIV. 395-427) the magician is instructed ‘you can also do it alone’ (XIV. 425) and Betz expands this phrase by adding ‘i.e., without a youth.’³⁶ Furthermore, it was most often the case that instructions detailing the use of boys were omitted from magical texts since the authors readily assumed that the

³³ Sarah Iles Johnston states ‘the few scholars who have tried to explain the use of children as mediums have emphasized that children are likely to be purer than adults, particularly in a sexual sense’ (Sarah Iles Johnston, ‘Charming Children: The Use of the Child in Ancient Divination’, *Arethusa* 34 (John Hopkins University Press, 2001) p. 106, for an investigation into the importance of youth and purity in boy mediums cf. pp. 106-108). Similarly, Daniel Ogden notes: ‘boys were often exploited in magical divinations. Their supposedly purer souls were evidently felt to be less firmly mired in their bodies and worldly things and so more easily detachable, be it for soul-flights...or for magical observations’ (D. Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook* (Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 171. For an authoritative study of child divination, see T. Hopfner, ‘Die Kindermedien in den Griechisch-Agyptischen Zauberpapyri’, *Receuil d’études dédiées à la mémoire de N. P. Kondakov* (Prague, 1926) pp. 65-74.

³⁴ Iamblichus, *Myst.* 3. 24.

³⁵ Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 18.

³⁶ Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) p. 220.

performer would be familiar with the necessary procedures.³⁷

Boy mediums have been used in magical practices from at least the fourth century B.C. and they were often employed in a practice known as ‘lecanomancy’, a method based on the notion that ghosts can manifest themselves in liquids.³⁸ In the initial stages of a lecanomatic divination rite, the boy is usually blindfolded or his vision is restricted.³⁹ Irenaeus mentions this practice when referring to the magicians in his *Against Heresies* (175-185 CE):

‘bringing forward mere boys [as the subjects on whom they practise], and deceiving their sight, while they exhibit phantasms that instantly cease.’⁴⁰

The blindfold is then removed and the boy is required to gaze into a reflective surface, such as stone, flames, or water. The images or shapes that the boy sees are thought to reveal a message from the gods or spirits.⁴¹ To aid the success of this type of divination,

³⁷ Sarah Iles Johnston comments on this phenomenon in her article on child divination: ‘Because those who copied spells into the papyri often omitted instructions that they thought were self-evident, not all examples of child mediumism include a complete and detailed description of the procedure’ (Sarah Iles Johnston, ‘Charming Children’, p. 101).

³⁸ As Daniel Ogden states: ‘Boy-mediums had been involved with soul-manipulation from at least the mid-fourth century B.C., the time of Aristotle...’ (Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. xxviii).

³⁹ See Sarah Iles Johnston, ‘Charming Children’, p. 101.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 2. 32. 3.

⁴¹ For this reason, lecanomancy was often practiced at lakesides and various spells to acquire the assistance of a νεκυδαίμων in the magical papyri instruct the magician to perform the rite in watery locations. Douglas Geyer draws from this symbolism when interpreting the incident of Jesus’ walking on the water in Mk. 6:45-53. Geyer suggests that Jesus appears in this passage as a member of the dead, a φάντασμα (or ghost) walking on the sea, a location typically linked the underworld and places of the dead. In addition, the scene is set at night which is normally the time of day favoured by magicians for necromantic consultations (Douglas W. Geyer, *Fear, Anomaly, and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark*, ATLA Monograph Series 47, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002) p. 241).

the magician is often directed to induce a trance-state in the boy in order to make him receptive to visions. Instructions to bring about a trance state for this purpose are provided in a text entitled 'Charm of Solomon that produces a trance' (PGM IV. 850-929).⁴² Betz comments that this title literally means 'Solomon's Collapse' and it is therefore 'an indication of ecstatic seizure'.⁴³ Convulsive behaviour in a boy was a contributing factor to the accusations of magic made against Apuleius. When his accusers claimed that a boy 'fell to the ground' in his presence and consequently sought to attach a charge of magic to Apuleius, he defended himself by claiming that the floor was slippery or that the boy was suffering an epileptic seizure.⁴⁴

In addition to their youth and sexual purity, many divination rituals in the Greek magical papyri require the boy to be naked and dressed in white linen. This manner of dress is described in a divination to Helios (PGM IV. 88-93) which instructs the magician to 'wrap a naked boy in linen from head to toe (σινδονιάσας κατὰ κεφαλῆς μέχρ[ι] ποδῶν γυμνὸν κρότα)'. Pure garments or pure sheets are an essential apparatus in most divinatory rites and they are occasionally used by the practitioner himself. For example, a text entitled 'Hermes' ring' requires the performer to 'put under the table a clean sheet'

⁴² The author of the text adds in parenthesis following the title 'works on both boys and on adults.'

⁴³ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, p. 55.

⁴⁴ Apuleius, *Apology*, 27. Having denied using a boy-medium, Apuleius later states 'it is my own personal opinion that the human soul, especially when it is young and unsophisticated, may by the allurements of music or the soothing influence of sweet smells be lulled into slumber and banished into oblivion of its surroundings so that, as all consciousness of the body fades from the memory, it returns and is reduced to its primal nature, which is in truth immortal and divine; and thus, as it were in a kind of slumber, it may predict the future' (*Apology*, 43). He adds: 'this miracle in the case of boys is confirmed not only by vulgar opinion but by the authority of learned men' (*Apology*, 42).

(σινδόνα καθαρὰν, PGM V. 220) and it is the magician himself who must put on a pure garment (ἐνδεδυμένος καθαρῶς) in the ‘Spell of Pnouthis’ (PGM I. 57).

Examples of child divination in the Greek Magical papyri appear to be the tip of the iceberg of an entire magical tradition that was associated with magical divination in antiquity. Since these procedures were commonplace and clearly related to magical practice, should the reader be suspicious of occasions in the Gospels in which Jesus is accompanied by a young man who is dressed in similar attire to the boy mediums in the magical papyri?

The νεανίσκος in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:51) and at the tomb (Mk. 16:5)

The identity and role of the νεανίσκος (‘young man’) who follows Jesus at Gethsemane (Mk. 14:51) has been subject to a great deal of discussion in New Testament scholarship since his function within the passage and his relationship with Jesus is unclear. Some commentators have suggested that the νεανίσκος of Mk. 14:51 could be the author of Mark inserting himself into the Gospel narrative.⁴⁵ However, we may presume from the great care taken by Mark to provide details regarding the youth’s unusual mode of dress that he did not intend the youth to be a superfluous literary device. In addition, simply by the criteria of embarrassment alone, the evangelist would not include a character dressed in such a bizarre fashion without good reason. It appears that the author of Mark was

⁴⁵ See Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952) p. 562. Taylor quotes Theodor Zahn: ‘[Mark] paints a small picture of himself in the corner of his work’ (T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol 2, (Edinburgh, 1909) p. 494).

comfortable with the inclusion of this strangely dressed, anonymous figure and therefore the νεανίσκος and the details of his unusual clothing must serve an important function within the narrative.

Another similarly dressed νεανίσκος appears later in Mk. 16:5 and some scholars have identified this figure as the same νεανίσκος previously encountered in Gethsemane. The white robe (στολήν λευκήν) worn by the youth in Mk. 16:5 has led some commentators to conclude that the figure is an angel.⁴⁶ However, although the term νεανίσκος is used to refer to an angel in 2 Macc. 3:26-34 and Tobit 5 (in this latter instance this is because the angel is disguised), Scroggs and Groff correctly point out that the author of Mark uses ἄγγελος ('angel') elsewhere within his Gospel seemingly without embarrassment, therefore it is likely that he would have used the term ἄγγελος if he intended the reader to recognise this figure as an angel.⁴⁷

It has also been proposed that the νεανίσκος in Mk. 16:5 is to be understood as the risen Jesus, particularly since he appears 'sitting on the right side' (καθήμενον ἐν τοῖς δεξιotois), a position which evokes the christological notion of the exalted Jesus seated at the right

⁴⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1959) p. 465; E. Schweizer, *Das Evangelium Nach Markus* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968) pp. 215-16.

⁴⁷ Robin Scroggs and Kent I. Groff, 'Baptism in Mark: Dying and Rising with Christ', *JBL* 92 (1973) p. 533. See Mk. 1:13, 8:38, 12:25, 13:27, 13:32. Moreover, Scroggs and Groff comment: 'In general, neaniskos does not seem sufficient by itself to carry the meaning of angel and nowhere else in the NT does it do so.' (Scroggs and Groff, 'Baptism in Mark', p. 534).

hand of God (cf. Mk. 12:36, 14:62).⁴⁸ Furthermore, white garments featured earlier in Mark's Gospel in the transfiguration narrative (Mk. 9:3). However, it is clear that Mark did not intend the νεανίσκος to represent the risen Jesus as the purpose of this figure within the narrative is to announce that Jesus is *not* in the tomb and to point towards his resurrection.

Others have suggested that the στολήν λευκήν worn by this young man indicates that he was undergoing a Christian baptism or a ritual involving a symbolic death and resurrection experience. For example, Scroggs and Groff observe:

‘Christian baptismal practice in the early centuries normally involved the actual stripping off of the clothes of the candidate before immersion and the robing in a white garment after he had emerged from the water.’⁴⁹

Although the customary dress of Christian baptism closely resembles the clothing of the νεανίσκος in Mk. 16:5, we immediately encounter difficulties with this theory when attempting to identify this character with the near-naked νεανίσκος accompanying Jesus in Gethsemane. First, the νεανίσκος in Mk. 14:51 is not dressed in a στολήν λευκήν but in a σινδών, a word used by all three Synoptic writers to describe the linen cloth in which Jesus' body was wrapped (Mk. 15:46//Mt. 27:59//Lk. 23:53). Some scholars have

⁴⁸ For example, Peterson demonstrates that terms relating to young people are used of Jesus in the apocryphal acts literature (E. Peterson, *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis* (Rome: Herder, 1959) pp. 191-196). Alternatively, for an interpretation of the νεανίσκος in Mk. 14:51-52 as the risen Christ see John Knox, 'A Note on Mark 14:51-52' in Sherman E. Johnson (ed.), *The Joy of Study: Papers on New Testament and Related Subjects Presented to Honor Frederick Clifton Grant* (New York: Macmillan, 1951) pp. 27-30.

⁴⁹ Scroggs and Groff, 'Baptism in Mark', p. 537ff. See also J. Smith, 'The Garments of Shame', *HR* 5 (1966) pp. 217-38.

deduced from this parallel that this σινδών is a burial cloth and therefore the youth must either be Lazarus or clothed in the ceremonial garb required for a death-rebirth ritual.⁵⁰ Second, if the reader of the Gospels is to identify the νεανίσκος in Mk. 14:51 as the same figure in the tomb in Mk. 16:5, then it may be tempting to suggest that both passages describe a pre-baptismal and post-baptismal individual, or equally a pre-initiatory and post-initiatory individual. However, this theory would require Jesus to have completed the youth's rite of transformation, either his baptism or initiation, between his arrest in Gethsemane and his resurrection from the tomb. Since the Gospel writers tell us that Jesus was in custody during this period, then the logical progression of events does not allow his interpretation. Furthermore the reader is led to believe that the youth is not a loyal follower of Jesus or fledgling disciple for, as Morton Smith notes, he runs away and abandons Jesus in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:52).⁵¹ If the youth is not to be understood as having a close relationship with Jesus, then what is his purpose in the narrative? And why would he follow Jesus around dressed in such an unusual manner if these were not baptismal or initiatory garments?

Readers of the divinatory rites in the Greek magical texts cannot fail to notice the similarities, particularly in clothing, between the boy mediums in the magical papyri and the νεανίσκος in Mk. 14:51 and 16:5. The youthfulness of the man is emphasised by Mark's use of the Greek word νεανίσκος, meaning 'young man' or 'servant', although the

⁵⁰ See Howard M. Jackson, 'Why the Youth Shed His Cloak and Fled Naked: The Meaning and Purpose of Mark 14:51-52', *JBL* 116. 2 (1997) p. 279.

⁵¹ On the notion that the young man in Mk. 14:51-52 is prepared for a baptismal ceremony, Morton Smith states 'this interpretation neglects only the main facts: this young man deserted Christ and saved himself' (M. Smith, 'Clement of Alexandria and Secret Mark: The Score at the End of the First Decade', *HTR* 75 (1982) p. 457, n. 19).

precise age indicated by the term νεανίσκος is contentious.⁵² Furthermore, the word σινδών which is used to refer to the linen cloth worn by the νεανίσκος in Mk. 14:51 is also found in many of the rituals in the Great Magical Papyri of Paris (PGM IV). For example, in PGM IV. 88-93 the magician is instructed to ‘wrap a naked boy in linen from head to toe (σινδονιάσας κατὰ κεφαλῆς μέχρ[ι] ποδῶν γυμνὸν κρότα)’ and in an ‘oracle of Kronos’ (PGM IV. 3086-3124) the practitioner is instructed to ‘be clothed with clean linen (σινδόνα καθαρὰν) in the garb of a priest of Isis’ (IV. 3096). The symbolic use of the σινδών to represent death and rebirth is evident in certain magical texts in which the participant is required to use a σινδών when performing a pseudo-burial. An example of this appears in a letter concerning bowl divination (PGM IV. 154 – 285) which permits the magician to consult a drowned man or dead man. It reads:

‘go up to the highest part of the house and spread a pure linen garment (σινδόνιον καθαρὸν) on the floor...and while looking upward lie down / naked on the linen (σινδόνα) and order your eyes to be completely covered with a black band. And wrap yourself like a corpse, close your eyes and, keeping your direction toward the sun, begin these words....’

Considering the similarities in age and dress between the boy-mediums in the magical papyri and the νεανίσκος in Mk. 14:51 and 16:5, would the early reader of the Gospels, who would in all probability be accustomed to these magical procedures or at least familiar with such activities, notice these resemblances and suspect that the youth in these Markan passages had an equally magical purpose?

⁵² Marvin Meyer suggests that the term indicates a young person in their twenties, perhaps even their thirties (Marvin Meyer, *Secret Gospels: Essays on Thomas and the Secret Gospel of Mark* (New York: Trinity Press, 2003) p. 120).

Necromantic activity in the Secret Gospel of Mark

It is with a great deal of trepidation that I venture a brief discussion into the various suspicious elements of necromantic activity within the 'Secret' Gospel of Mark. Being fully aware of the current controversy regarding the credibility of this source, I do not intend to engage with issues surrounding the authenticity of the text and therefore evidence from the extended version of Mark is offered as a supplement to the earlier observations made in canonical Mark.⁵³ Furthermore, should the extended version of Mark be conclusively proven to be inauthentic, then this will not have a dramatic impact on our investigation since implications of divinatory processes have previously been established by the two instances of a suspiciously dressed νεανίσκος in canonical Mark. Therefore rejecting evidence gathered from this text on the basis of its dubious credibility will simply diminish the evidence of divinatory practices within the Gospels by one-third rather than discredit the suggestion in total.

The reader of Secret Mark is again presented with a young man who is 'wearing a linen cloth (σινδωνα) over his naked body' and once more commentators have attempted to explain his unusual dress by suggesting that the youth is undergoing an early Christian

⁵³ Readers who are interested in the current state of scholarship regarding the authenticity of Secret Mark are directed to the recent publication by Stephen C. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark* (Baylor University Press, 2005). Carlson provides a comprehensive overview of scholarly investigation into this text to date and argues that Secret Mark is a modern forgery that has been fabricated by Morton Smith himself.

baptismal ceremony.⁵⁴ To propose that the series of events in Secret Mark describe a Christian baptism raises the same difficulties as those previously identified in canonical Mark and there are additional elements within this passage that render this interpretation particularly problematic. For example, if the young man in Secret Mark is simply undergoing a Christian baptismal ceremony, then why is it necessary for the youth to come to Jesus during the evening in a secretive manner and remain with him throughout the night? And why would Clement refer to this particular act as a *μυστικὰς* ('secret doing') of Jesus?

In his *Letter to Theodore*, Clement hints at a distinction between the *πράξεις τοῦ Κυρίου* ('doings of the Lord') that are recorded in canonical Mark and the *μυστικὰς* ('mystical/secret') doings of Jesus that are absent in canonical Mark:

'As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord's doings (*πράξεις τοῦ Κυρίου*)⁵⁵, not, however, declaring all of them, nor yet hinting at the secret (*μυστικὰς*) ones, but selecting what he thought most useful for increasing the faith of those who were being instructed' (I.15– 18, trans. M. Smith).

The clandestine nature of the extended Markan narrative is established at the outset by identifying this text as a *μυστικὸν εὐαγγέλιον* (II. 12), which immediately instils in the reader a sense of supernatural foreboding. Scott Brown states that the translation of *μυστικὸν* in the title as 'secret' or 'mystic' has significant implications, since 'a mystic text is not necessarily a secret writing' but a secret text implies that it must be hidden or

⁵⁴ M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) pp. 176-177. Also, Scroggs and Groff, 'Baptism in Mark', pp. 547-548.

⁵⁵ The 'deeds of Christ' (*τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Χριστοῦ*) appear in Matthew 11: 2.

that it contains elements that must not be revealed.⁵⁶ As indicated in Morton Smith's translation above, the translation of μυστικὰς as 'secret ones' thereby implies that these activities took place in secret and that their details were consciously withheld from public speculation.⁵⁷ If the author of Mark omitted these additional details of Jesus' secret or mystical 'doings' on the basis that they were to remain out of public circulation, then what could this supplementary passage in Secret Mark possibly contain that could prove to be so provocative or damaging?

The statement 'Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God' (3:8-9) certainly indicates a strong element of tuition and suggests that the youth is undergoing a secret initiation, such as those associated with mystery cults. If the passage was considered by the author of canonical Mark to describe an initiation rather than a baptism, then the evangelist may have been understandably reluctant to reveal too much detail regarding the methods used by Jesus to pass on his mystical teachings to his initiates. Alternatively, these activities may have been interpreted by the early reader as instances of magical practice and consequently the Gospel evangelist may have censored this passage and omitted it from the final version of his Gospel, hence this passage subsequently came to be referred to under the vague heading of 'mystical' or 'secret' doings. The magical connotations of the term μυστήριον are discussed by Betz who observes that in the Greek magical papyri: 'magic is simply called μυστήριον (mystery, PGM IV. 723, 746; XII.

⁵⁶ Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005) p. 122.

⁵⁷ However, Brown suggests that a preference to avoid the term 'mystery' is the direct result of early Christianity's attempts to avoid the influence of mystery cults on Christianity (Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, p. 124).

331, 333) or μυστήρια (mysteries, IV. 476, V. 110)'.⁵⁸ Smith boldly suggests that the 'mystery of the kingdom' was a magical ritual in itself.⁵⁹

There are certainly many opportunities within the passage for those familiar with the magical traditions of the ancient world to grow suspicious of magical activity, particularly the presence of a naked youth dressed in a linen cloth and the imparting of secret knowledge during the night, a time which, although terribly clichéd, is typically associated with necromantic activity.⁶⁰ In addition, a strict interval of six days (ἡμέρας ἕξ) elapses before Jesus summons the boy to him. Are we to understand that Jesus has allowed the boy a period of convalescence to recover from the trauma of returning from the dead? Or does this indicate that a period of preparation has been necessary to equip the boy for the event which Jesus subsequently commands him to attend?

Most magical procedures require any individual who is uninitiated or unfamiliar with the performance of a rite to complete a period of preparation prior to the ritual. The pre-training of a child medium is a customary requirement in the magical papyri; for example, a 'vessel inquiry' (PDM XIV. 239-95) suggests that the magician uses 'a pure youth who has been tested' (XIV. 287). Similarly, in PGM II. 55 the magician must use 'an uncorrupted boy, who has been tested' (παῖδι ἀφθόρῳ γυμναζομένῳ) and Betz writes

⁵⁸ H. D. Betz, 'Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri' in Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (eds.) *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p. 249.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 135.

⁶⁰ The practitioners of the spells in the Greek magical papyri are frequently instructed to perform their rituals 'at night' (cf. PGM IV. 3091) and daimons are often invoked from out of the dark (cf. PGM XXXVI. 138, οἱ ἐν τῷ σκοτει δαίμονες). Also, Heraclitus associates the magi with the 'night-walkers' (Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 22.2).

in his comments on this text: ‘γυμναζομένῳ means literally ‘trained’ or ‘practiced’’.⁶¹ A period of preparation is also necessary if the rite is to be performed by the practitioner himself.⁶² He is usually advised to purify himself and abstain from sex for several days beforehand in order to achieve a state of purity. For example, PGM IV. 1097 instructs the magician to ‘purify yourself from everything three days in advance’ and PGM IV. 3210 states that the practitioner should keep himself ‘pure for 7 days.’ A period of sexual purity is emphasised in PGM IV. 898 (‘keeping him from intercourse for 3 days’) and PGM I. 40-42 states: ‘[this] rite [requires complete purity]. Conceal, conceal the [procedure and] for [7] days [refrain] from having intercourse with a woman.’ Rites of initiation into mystery cults typically involved a period of purification and preparation prior to the initiation ceremony. For example, in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, Lucius undergoes a purification ritual several days before his initiation into the Isis cult and he is clothed in a linen robe on the day of the ritual.⁶³

If Secret Mark is an authentic document which reveals the ‘mystical’ or ‘secret’ doings of Jesus, then we have a huge wealth of evidence from which to draw parallels between Jesus’ behaviour in the Gospels and the activities of the magician operating within the ancient magical tradition. However, if Morton Smith is responsible for constructing this extended version of Mark, then perhaps he had these particular magical procedures in mind when doing so and fully intended to raise our suspicions of dubious practice in order to add a pinch of magic to Jesus’ ministry. In either event, the existence of the text

⁶¹ Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, p. 14. n. 17.

⁶² Sarah Iles Johnston, ‘Charming Children’, p. 107.

⁶³ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, XI. 2.

indicates that someone, either an ancient Gospel writer or a modern New Testament scholar, understood that Jesus was engaging in activities that were not only secretive, but also carried significant connotations of magical behaviour.



Returning to Herod's statement in Mk. 6:14//Mt. 14:2, it is entirely possible to interpret this as an allegation that Jesus is consulting the deceased spirit of John the Baptist, especially considering that Jesus is often accompanied by a figure who fits perfectly into the role of a magician's medium. In addition, C. H. Kraeling in his study 'Was Jesus Accused of Necromancy?' observes that the term used for the conjuring up of spirits of the dead in magical texts, namely *ἐγείρειν*, is identical to that used by the author of Mark in Mk. 6:14.⁶⁴ Since the dead were most often manipulated for divinatory purposes, evidence of foresight or prophetic visions of the future were valuable indicators of necromantic activity⁶⁵, therefore the consultation of the dead is not a behaviour that we would expect to find associated with Jesus in the Gospel accounts. In spite of this, all

⁶⁴ C. H. Kraeling, 'Was Jesus Accused of Necromancy?', *JBL* 59 (1940) p. 155. Arndt and Gingrich translate *ἐγείρω* as 'raise, help to rise' (W. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) p. 213-214). Mark uses the term *ἐγείρειν* of Jesus' resurrection (Mk. 16:6) and of people after healing (Mk. 1:31; 2:9-12; 3:3; 9:27; 10:49). In addition to indicating the raising of the dead (Mt. 11:5; Mk. 5:41; Lk. 7:14, 7:22, 8:54; Jn. 5:21), the term is also used in the Gospels to indicate the movement of the body upon awaking from sleep (Mt. 2:13, 2:20, 8:26; Mk. 4:27, 14:42). Oepke recognises the various interpretations of *ἐγείρω* by translating the term as 'to rise up', also 'to make well, to rise up strengthened' and "to raise the dead" or pass. 'to rise from the dead'" (Albrecht Oepke, *ἐγείρω/ἐγερσις*, TDNT, vol. 2, p. 335).

⁶⁵ Hence Philostratus protects Apollonius against a charge of magic by claiming: 'his foreknowledge was gained not by wizardry, but from what the gods revealed to him' (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 5.12).

three Synoptic authors report that Jesus was skilled at prophecy and that he was privy to information concerning future events, as indicated by his own passion predictions (cf. Mk. 8:31; 10:33f; 14:8, 18, 27-31 and pars.). He also appears talking with Moses and Elijah during his transfiguration (Mk. 9:4// Mt. 17:3// Lk. 9:30). As this consultation with Moses and Elijah is initiated by Jesus and the author of Luke specifically states that they revealed to him details about his future ('they spoke of his departure' ἔλεγον τὴν ἔξοδον, Lk. 9:31), is the reader to understand that Jesus had invoked the dead in order to consult with them concerning future events?⁶⁶

Alternatively, in contrast to theories of corpse reanimation and spirit divination, Kraeling proposes that when Herod states that John 'has been raised from the dead' he does not mean that Jesus is in communication with the spirit of John, but his words reflect the popular opinion circulating amongst the people of Galilee that Jesus *had*, or was in possession of, the spirit of John the Baptist.⁶⁷ This position was later supported by Morton Smith who explains the allegation made in Mk. 6:14 as follows:

'John the Baptist has been raised from the dead (by Jesus' necromancy; Jesus now has him). And therefore (since Jesus-John can control them) the (inferior) powers work (their wonders) by him (that is, by his orders).'⁶⁸

Interpreting Herod's statement in terms of Jesus' possession of the spirit of John exposes an identical allegation to that made by the Pharisees in the Beelzebul controversy (Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15). In this instance, rather than proposing that Jesus' miraculous

⁶⁶ It could be argued that since Elijah was carried to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:7-12), we cannot identify him as a member of the dead.

⁶⁷ Kraeling, 'Was Jesus Accused of Necromancy?' pp. 147-57

⁶⁸ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 34.

powers have a demonic source, Herod is claiming that Jesus draws his power from the magical manipulation of the soul of John the Baptist. The wealth of evidence surrounding the magical employment of the souls of the untimely dead in the ancient world suggests that this explanation of Jesus' powers would have been perfectly natural to a first century audience and therefore Kraeling's theory is a very persuasive proposal.

The magical manipulation of the untimely and violently dead in the ancient world

Cause of death was of great importance to people in the ancient world and an individual's manner of death was noted and interpreted accordingly. Numerous civilisations throughout history have feared the souls of those who have met a violent or early demise since the ominous nature of this kind of death made it both frightening and highly suspect.⁶⁹ Tertullian, in his *De Anima*, assigns these souls to two distinct categories; those who had died before their natural allotment of time on earth (the ἄωποι) and those that had been killed by violence (the βιαιοθάνατοι), including suicides, murder victims and those killed in battle.⁷⁰ A contributing factor to the fear surrounding the βιαιοθάνατοι in particular was the notion that if the soul was taken from the body by violence then this would prolong its co-existence amongst the living. From the fifth-century BC onward, a growing number of texts underline the popular theory that the 'untimely dead' or 'dead by violence' are unable to enter the Underworld and that they must remain restless until

⁶⁹ Bowersock comments that 'an aura of the unnatural, the inhuman, and the diabolical [was] attached to the victim of violent death' (Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 71).

⁷⁰ Tertullian, *De Anima*, 56-57. For an extensive study on the ἄωποι, see Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks* (London: Kegan Paul, 1925).

they reached the time of their natural death from old age.⁷¹ For example, in Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates recounts the popular belief that the dead are unable to ascend or descend and that they are forced to live in and around their graves, restlessly wandering and seeking ways to assault the living and avenge their death.⁷²

Stories concerning the earth-bound, or more specifically the corpse-bound, nature of these spirits may have arisen from direct observations of the cadavers of those who suffered a sudden death. Modern medical studies reveal that the bodies of victims who have been killed suddenly or violently tend to behave abnormally following death. Not only do these bodies decompose at a slower pace, but often their blood reliquifies. For example, Arthur Keith Mant, a leading forensic scientist and pathologist in the 1980s, writes:

‘It is clear that uncoagulable fluid blood is normally present in the limb vessels and often in the heart of any healthy person who dies a sudden natural or unnatural death from almost any cause.’⁷³

The German forensic pathologist Albert Ponsold comments that these symptoms are ‘characteristic of ... deaths that involve sudden end to the functions of either the heart or the central nervous system’⁷⁴ and John Glaister observes that the same process occurs in

⁷¹ Porphyry attempts to explain this phenomenon when he writes: ‘The soul, having even after death a certain affection for its body, art affinity proportioned to the violence with which their union was broken, we see many spirits hovering in despair about their earthly remains; we even see them eagerly seeking the putrid remains of other bodies’ (Porphyry, *De Sacrificiis*, Chapter on the True Cultus).

⁷² Plato, *Phaedo*, 6.

⁷³ A. Keith Mant, (ed.) *Taylor's Principles and Practice of Medical Jurisprudence*, 13th ed. (Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1984) p. 139.

⁷⁴ Albert Ponsold, *Lehrbuch der gerichtlichen Medizin*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Georg Thieme Verlag 1957) p. 292.

the following situations:

‘when death has been sudden, as from concussion, suffocation, electrocution (worldwide, people struck by lightening tend to be among the dangerous dead) or following a short attack of angina pectoris.’⁷⁵

Anyone unacquainted with this abnormal post-mortem phenomenon would therefore assume when coming into contact with the body of an individual who had suffered a violent or sudden death that the body was still alive, since it would bleed when cut and decompose more slowly than usual.

For the ancient magician, the vengeful nature of both the ἄωποι and the βαιοθάνατοι and their hostility towards the living and resentment toward their killers singled them out as particularly keen to lend their aid to magical activity, as their bitterness could be redirected to victims at the discretion of the magician.⁷⁶ Tertullian addresses this magical spirit-manipulation in his *De Anima*, describing how the violently killed and the ‘too early killed’ were frequently invoked in many types of magical ritual and they appeared to the magician as *phantasmata*.⁷⁷ Morton Smith also comments on this popular principle

⁷⁵ John Glaister and Edgar Rentoul, *Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology*, 12th ed. (Edinburgh and London: E. & M. S. Livingstone, 1966) pp. 115-16.

⁷⁶ David G. Martinez writes: ‘like the unburied (ἄταφοι) and those who die violently (βαιοθάνατοι), the ἄωποι cannot enter Hades...a fact which makes them especially valuable for the purposes of magic, because of both their availability and hostility’ (David G. Martinez, ‘P. Michigan XVI: A Greek Love Charm from Egypt (P. Mich.757)’, *American Studies in Papyrology* 30 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991) p. 48). In their discussion of the necromantic implications in the Martyrdom of Polycarp, Jan Den Boeft and Jan Bremmer note that ‘to perform necromancy with a biothanati was normal practice in Antiquity’ (Jan Den Boeft and Jan Bremmer, ‘Notiunculae Martyrologicae III. Some Observations on the Martyria of Polycarp and Pionius’, *VC* 39. 2 (1985) p. 118).

⁷⁷ Tertullian, *De Anima*, 52.

of ancient magic:

‘the spirit of any human being who came to an unjust, violent, or otherwise untimely end was of enormous power. If a magician could call and get control of, or identify himself with such a spirit, he could then control inferior spirits or powers.’⁷⁸

Since these vengeful souls were considered to be of such great value to the magician, if one could not be found then one would be made. Hence there were reports of magicians in antiquity who performed boy sacrifice in order to create a restless spirit and this is probably the origin of the rumour that Simon Magus performed his ‘miracles’ using the soul of a murdered boy that he created out of thin air and promptly sacrificed.⁷⁹ In addition to the human dead, the souls of animals were also used in magical manipulations. For example, PGM XII. 107-21 contains instructions on the use of ‘a black cat that has died a violent death’ and certain texts in the magical papyri give instructions on the ‘deification’ of animals in order to grant the magician a powerful spirit through which he can work his magic.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 34.

⁷⁹ *Clementine Recognitions*, XV: ‘Then we understood that he spake concerning that boy, whose soul, after he had been slain by violence, he made use of for those services which he required.’ Even the post-crucifixion Jesus was subjected to magical exploitation in view of the violent nature of his death and we will explore this later in Chapter IX.

⁸⁰ Other texts including the ‘deifying a spring mouse’ (PGM IV. 2457) and the ‘deification of a field lizard’ (PGM VII. 628). PGM III.1 states that drowning the animal causes it to be transformed into an *Esies*. Betz interprets the term *Esies* as ‘an epithet of the sacred dead often applied to Osiris who was drowned and restored to life’ (Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, p. 334) and Eitrem explains that ‘the drowned were sacred according to the Egyptian belief’ (S. Eitrem, ‘Tertullian de Bapt. 5: Sanctified by Drowning’, *Classical Review* 38. 3/4 (1924) p. 69).

Although some curse tablets, or *defixiones*, have been discovered in caves or bodies of water such as wells, since the dead were considered to be a healthy supply of useful spirits it is no surprise that the majority of curse tablets have been found in graves. Magicians considered graves to be gateways to the underworld and they would often insert their curse tablets into them, the tablets essentially acting as ‘letters’ and the corpse acting as a ‘letterbox’ to the underworld. This procedure is demonstrated in PGM V. 334-339 which provides the following directions for constructing a curse tablet:

‘taking it [the package] away to the grave of someone untimely dead, dig [a hole] four fingers deep and put it in and say ‘Spirit of the dead, who[ever] you are, I give over NN to you, so that he may not do the NN thing.’ Then, when you have filled up the hole, go away.’

The earliest curse tablets do not accredit power to the corpse itself, but a change occurs around the fourth-century BC and the dead themselves become a power that can be exploited. Magical texts and curse tablets from the fourth-century BC onwards began to address the ghost of a corpse directly and refer to this spirit as a *δαίμόνιον*.⁸¹ The use of the spirits of the dead came to be such a standard feature in ancient magic that it was eventually crystallised in the special term *νεκυδαίμονες* (‘corpse demon’). The term *νεκυδαίμονες* recurs frequently throughout the Greek magical papyri, particularly in the Great Magical Papyri of Paris (dated to around 200 AD) in which the term is used in the construction of love charms such as the ‘Wondrous Spell for Binding a Lover’ (PGM IV.

⁸¹ This correlation between the Greek *daimons* and the souls of the dead was not only made in magical texts. For example, Josephus makes the same connection in *Bellum Judaicum* 1.82, 84 and *Antiquitates Judaicae* 13.314, 317, 415-416. For more on the association between the dead and the daimonic, see Peter G. Bolt, ‘Jesus, the Daimons and the Dead’ in Anthony N. S. Lane (ed.), *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm* (Paternoster: 1996) pp. 75-102.

296-466). This particular binding spell requires the magician to place the text beside the grave of one who has died an untimely or violently death and adjure all the 'daimons' of the graveyard to 'stand as assistants beside this daimon' for the magician's consequent employment. Later in the same text, the daimon of the corpse is invoked with the special term *νεκύδαμον* (IV. 360). Other rites from the same papyrus instruct the magician regarding methods used to employ the disembodied souls of the violently dead as spiritual assistants on earth. For example, there is a love spell of attraction performed with the help of heroes or gladiators or those who have died a violent death (PGM IV. 1390-1495), a rite for binding a lover using the demons of 'men and women who have died untimely deaths' (PGM IV. 296-466) and in a Prayer of Petition to Helios (PGM IV. 1950-1955) the magician prays:

'I beg you, lord Helios, hear me NN and grant me power over the spirit of this man who died a violent death... so that I may keep him with me [NN] as helper and avenger for whatever business I crave from him.'⁸²

In support of this widespread magical practice, Daniel Ogden comments in his study of curse tablets that 'whenever the *age* of the occupant of a grave in which a curse tablet is found can be estimated, it proves to be young'⁸³, therefore there is a high probability that the inhabitant of a grave in which a curse tablet was found has died an untimely or violent death.

⁸² See also PGM LVII. 1-37, dating from the 1st or 2nd century A.D, which reads 'I will not break [the] bonds with which you bound Typhon, *and I will not call those who have died a violent death but will leave them alone*' (LVII. 5-6, my emphasis).

⁸³ Daniel Ogden, 'Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds' in V. Flint, R. Gordon, G. Luck, D. Ogden, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (London: Athlone, 1999) p. 16.

Since an association between the *daimones* and the dead is evident in curse tablets and magical papyri several centuries on either side of the New Testament period, the early readers of the Gospels would most probably have made a connection between the ‘demons’ exorcised by Jesus and the spirits of the dead. Peter G. Bolt suggests that the author of Mark uses δαιμόνιον and πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (‘unclean spirit’) interchangeably in order to ensure that his readers understand both to be the same⁸⁴ and therefore:

‘Although it would be a rare reader today who would equate the ‘demons’ exorcised by Jesus with ghosts, i.e. spirits of deceased human beings who still exert an influence upon the living, many ancient readers of the Gospels would have done so automatically.’⁸⁵

The account of the Gerasene demoniac in Mk. 5:1-20 clearly demonstrates that fears regarding the untimely dead and their influence upon the living were common within the New Testament era. This scene in Mark’s Gospel depicts an encounter with the unsettled dead and describes their post-mortem existence among the living, their ability to possess the living and their inclination towards displays of aggressive and violent behaviour.

The dead as possessing spirits and the Gerasene demoniac (Mk. 5:1-20)

As the author of Mark states that the Gerasene demoniac has been living amongst the tombs (Mk. 5:3) there is a strong possibility that the early reader of the Gospels, who was accustomed to various superstitions surrounding the untimely dead, would naturally assume that the demoniac has been exposed to wrathful spirits forced to remain within

⁸⁴ Peter G. Bolt, ‘Jesus, the Daimons and the Dead’, p. 77, n. 3.

⁸⁵ Peter G. Bolt, ‘Jesus, the Daimons and the Dead’, p. 75.

the vicinity of their graves.⁸⁶ This association between spirit-possession and the individual's proximity to the graves of the dead is reinforced by the ancient magical practice known as 'incubation', a method in which the magician would sleep on top of a grave in order to encounter the ghost of the spirit within.⁸⁷ It is the process of 'incubation' that is described by Philostratus in his account of Apollonius of Tyana's consultation of Achilles⁸⁸ and this practice is also mentioned in Isaiah 65:4 regarding those who 'who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places'.

Gerd Theissen suggests that the demons possessing the man in Mk. 5:1-20 are the spirits of the dead and he speculates that they are the ghosts of those who fell in battle with the Romans. He muses in a small footnote in *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*:

'the possessed are clearly in the power of spirits of the dead which have not found rest, which is why they stay by the tombs. Could they have been fallen fighters who lost their lives in the resistance?' ⁸⁹

Since Theissen does not elaborate on this short statement, we are forced to assume that his theory is entirely based upon the revelation of the demon's name as 'legion'.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ For the notion that the living can be possessed by the ghosts of the dead, see Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 18.

⁸⁷ See Daniel Odgen, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, Chapter 6 'Incubation and Dreaming' (p. 75ff).

⁸⁸ In order to consult Achilles, Apollonius was required to spend the night on his 'barrow' (Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius*, 4.11).

⁸⁹ Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) p. 89, n. 21, 255, n. 58.

⁹⁰ This title may well be figurative rather than literal, although there are many examples of 'Legion' appearing in Greek writings from the first century B.C. (See G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) pp. 76-77).

However, the validity of this hypothesis is strengthened by a wealth of evidence which suggests that soldiers and those killed in battle were deemed the most fearful of restless spirits. Not only had these souls suffered a violent death, but as the bodies of soldiers often remained unburied and unidentified on the battlefield, this disrespectful treatment of the corpse was thought to contribute to the spirit's restlessness. For this reason, the souls of the unburied acquired a classification of their own in ancient magic⁹¹ and battlefields were frequented by necromancers either looking to procure a useful familiar spirit or seeking to place curse tablets for activation by restless ghosts.⁹² The souls of soldiers commonly appear as familiar spirits in the magical papyri; for example, PGM IV. 1390-1495 is entitled: 'A love spell of attraction performed with the help of heroes or gladiators or those who have died a violent death'. In addition, it was against this background of magical tradition that the witch Erictho in Lucan's *Pharsalia* chose to consult the ghost of an unburied soldier⁹³ and Apollonius of Tyana was reported to have exorcised the restless ghost of a soldier who had taken possession of a boy.⁹⁴

Throughout this exorcism in Mk. 5:1-20, the hostility and violent nature of the spirits possessing the Gerasene demoniac are evident in the demoniac's aggressive behaviour

⁹¹ Daniel Ogden refers to 'those deprived of burial' as *ataphoi*, (Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 146), however he also states that those who do not receive the correct burial rites are known as the *atelestoi* ('unfulfilled') (Daniel Ogden, 'Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds' in V. Flint, R. Gordon, G. Luck and D. Ogden (eds.) *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, vol. 2 (London: Athlone Press, 1999) pp. 21-22.

⁹² See Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, Chapter 1: Tombs and Battlefields (p. 3ff).

⁹³ Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6. 717-987.

⁹⁴ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 3. 38.

and amazing strength (Mk. 5:3-5). The vengefulness of these spirits is finally demonstrated in their chosen method of expulsion - a cathartic release in the form of a καταποντίσμος, ('sea dive'), an ancient ritual associated with sacrifices to Poseidon and described by Douglas Geyer as 'an elimination of impurity' and, most importantly, 'an implementation of revenge.'⁹⁵ If the author of this exorcism account was aware that the spirits of the dead were generally violent and vengeful and that they could return to exert their influence upon the living, then perhaps this is the fundamental theory that lies beneath Herod's statement in Mk. 6:14//Mt. 14:2. As established at the beginning of this chapter, it is unlikely that the reader is to interpret the Jesus-John relationship in terms of spirit-possession due to the fact that Herod states that John 'has been raised from the dead', i.e. that an external force has acted upon the body and/or soul of John to raise him from his grave. I would suggest that the relationship between Jesus and the post-mortem John is to be understood as an allegation of magical spirit manipulation. Herod is proposing that Jesus has raised the spirit of John from the dead and that he is using this spirit to perform miracles, much in the same way that a magician in the ancient world would employ a βιαιοθάνατος to carry out his magical operations.

John the Baptist as a βιαιοθάνατος

By stating 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised' (Mk. 6:16), Herod draws attention to John's mode of death and indicates to the reader that his death satisfies the credentials for the creation of a highly vengeful spirit that is ripe for magical exploitation. There are

⁹⁵ Douglas W. Geyer, *Fear, Anomaly, and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 136.

a number of differing opinions regarding decapitation in the ancient world. The Romans regarded it as a quick and painless death and therefore it was often reserved for dignitaries, but to Greek minds it was a brutal act and counted amongst the most violent of deaths. To illustrate this, Douglas Geyer refers to beheading as ‘a type of σπαραγμός, or a desecrative rending of the flesh, as also will be the crucifixion later in Mark.’⁹⁶ Due to their violent demise, the souls of the beheaded were feared throughout antiquity and accounts of headless men and headless creatures were particularly common. In Hellenistic Egypt it was believed that the spirit of a beheaded criminal became a type of ‘headless’ demon known as an *Akephalos* and these headless demons frequently appear in the magical papyri.⁹⁷ For example, the incantation in PGM V. 96 is addressed to a ‘Headless one’ (ἀκέφαλον) and the magician later claims in the same text that he is to be identified as a ‘headless daimon’ (ἀκέφαλος δαίμων, V. 145).

Due to the fear associated with the victims of a violent death in the ancient world, especially regarding victims of decapitation, the method of John’s execution in Mk. 6:16 would have been particularly significant for the early reader of the Gospels. Peter Bolt, for instance, recognises that John’s beheading would have made him a prime candidate for magical manipulation.⁹⁸ I would therefore suggest that it is possible to interpret Mk. 6:14-29//Mt. 14:2 as an allegation that Jesus is using the spirit of John as a powerful βαιοθάνατος by which to perform his miracles. Furthermore, by identifying himself as the killer and accepting responsibility for John’s death, Herod reveals that he fears

⁹⁶ Douglas W. Geyer, *Fear, Anomaly, and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 215.

⁹⁷ For more on the *Akephalos* see Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, p. 335.

⁹⁸ Peter G. Bolt, ‘Jesus, the Daimons and the Dead’, p. 101.

retaliation from John's vengeful spirit and this may account for his steadfast opinion that it is John who has returned and his reluctance to consider the alternative candidates proposed in Mk. 6:15//Lk. 9:7-8.

Since the Gospel writers frequently portray Jesus as knowledgeable regarding binding methods used by magicians to control demonic spirits in the ancient world (as demonstrated in Chapter VI), it is perfectly reasonable to assume that Jesus was also capable of employing these techniques to gain the control over spirits of the dead, such as John the Baptist, particularly since the demons that are exorcised in the Gospels are occasionally identified as the spirits of the dead (Mk. 5:1-20). Furthermore, the magical tradition reveals that a magician who had gained control over the spirits of the dead could not only cast them out in exorcism, but he could also 'set them to work' on specific tasks such as healing, exorcising other spirits or divination. In consideration of this, Herod's allegation that Jesus is able to perform miracles through the magical manipulation of the spirit of John is not only understandable, but in accordance with the principles of ancient magic it is also an entirely credible interpretation of Jesus' power-source.



If the critic would dismiss the possibility that Jesus' miraculous powers had a demonic, or daimonic, source on account that this evidence is found in the mouths of Jesus' opponents in the Gospels who intended to discredit his authority and claims to messiahship, then it is necessary to silence any deliberation from hostile sources and proceed from hereon accompanied solely by the words and behaviour of Jesus himself as

presented by the evangelists. In order to conclusively confirm that Jesus has control of a spirit in the Gospels, rather than *visa versa*, we would ideally hope to uncover an aspect of coerciveness in Jesus' approach to his empowering spirit or, at the very least, an indication of his ability to compel a spirit to obey his will. Whereas the implications of demonic and daimonic manipulation discussed in the previous chapters VI and VII were made by Jesus' opponents, we will discover in the following chapter that valuable evidence of spirit manipulation can also be found in Jesus' own behaviour and teachings within the Gospels, namely the implied manipulation of the Holy Spirit in Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 11:20, the use of the title 'Son of God' as a means of self-identification, the arrival of a familiar spirit in the baptism narratives and the cursing of the fig tree in Mk. 11:12-24//Mt. 21:18-22. I would suggest that evidence of spirit manipulation and a coercive attitude can be discerned in Jesus' own words, teachings or behaviour in each of these passages and this annihilates all possession theories and firmly stamps the seal of magic on his ministry. However, the spiritual source in question does not derive from the demonic or the dead in this instance, but from the most common source of assisting spirits employed by the magician in the ancient world; the divine.

CHAPTER VIII

THY WILL BE DONE? GODLY FAMILIARS, THE COERCIVE WILL OF THE MAGICIAN AND THE MANIPULATION OF THE DIVINE s/SPIRIT IN THE GOSPELS

Man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep.

~ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act II, Scene II ~

Although Honi the Circle-Drawer is exalted in both sacred and secular literature as a prime example of a Jewish charismatic who performed miracles through pious prayers to God rather than by magical means, the Talmud contains an account of Honi's famous prayer for rain that paints a very contradictory picture of his approach to God and identifies a manner of speech that is demanding, insistent and regarded as an example of 'arrogance towards heaven.'¹ When asked by the people to pray for rain, Honi addresses

¹ Judah Goldin, 'On Honi the Circle-Maker: A Demanding Prayer', *HTR* 56. 3 (1963) p. 234.

God with the following statement:

'I swear by your great Name, that I will not stir from here until you have compassion on your children!' (M. Taanit 3:8)

In view of Honi's impious behaviour towards God, the leader of the Pharisees scolds him and exclaims:

**'You are presumptuous before the Creator and yet he does as you wish, like a son presumes on his father and he does whatever he wishes.'
(M. Taanit 3.8)**

The notion that a human being can influence a divine spirit to obey his will by employing a series of threatening demands may seem incredible to the majority of readers operating under the contemporary Western Christian perception of God as a remote being, far removed from our earthly realm and situated at a distance in the heavens. However, the magicians of antiquity considered their gods to be far more readily accessible and they alleged that it was not only the lesser spirits of the demonic and the dead that were ripe for magical exploitation but also the supreme gods themselves. Consequently the ancient magician would often attempt to command the gods to do his bidding, either by gaining possession of a god or a divine spirit that would work continually under his authority as an assisting spirit, or by persuading a god to grant the magician an equal status so that he too can possess divine powers, or by employing a series of threats to coerce the god to obey the magician's will and respond whenever he requires the use of the spirit's power. It is this third and final method that is implied in Honi's address to God in the quotation above and it is this approach that is ultimately responsible for the caricature of the arrogant, proud magician who threatens and shouts at his god until his demands are met.

With all three of these techniques constituting irrefutable evidence of magical practice in the ancient world, the early reader of the Gospels who was accustomed to this type of magical behaviour would surely be surprised to encounter instances in which Jesus appears to behave in this manner, particularly evidence of behaviour which suggests that he was in possession of a divine spirit or that he had a coercive approach to God. Nevertheless, there are occasions in which Jesus admits that a spiritual power is working under his authority and at times it appears that he is seeking to influence the will of God.

The implied manipulation of the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 11:20)

When accused by the Pharisees and the scribes of manipulating a demonic spirit and practising magic (Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:1), the reader would naturally expect Jesus to reject the possibility that he is using a spirit and thereby deny a charge of magic. Surprisingly, although Jesus fervently denies that his powers are fundamentally demonic, his response is not to deny the use of a spirit but to correct the Pharisees' mistaken *identification* of it and redirect his accusers to the correct source of his exorcistic power; the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:28-29//Mt. 12:31-32). Consequently the charge of a spiritual intermediary at work in Jesus exorcistic activities remains intact and as Eve observes:

'the point at issue is not whether Jesus is spirit-empowered but the nature of the empowering spirit: Beelzebul or the Spirit of God.'²

² Eric Eve, 'The Jewish Context of Jesus' Miracles', *JSNTSup* 231 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) p. 375.

A claim to divine assistance was a common defence used by the magician in antiquity who, when unable to deny a charge of magic, would attempt to justify his activities to opponents who accused him of using demonic powers by indicating that heavenly spirits were in operation or that a god had aided him in his activities. However this divine damage limitation exercise was not without fault. By identifying the spiritual power behind his operations as a divine spirit or even a deity itself, the magician often incurred fresh charges of blasphemy from his opponents. This defensive measure appears to be present in Jesus' response in Mk. 3:28-29//Mt. 12:31-32: 'whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.' Although this response successfully counters an accusation of collusion with demonic spirits, it is also a candid confession that Jesus is using a spirit-authority to carry out his exorcisms and, since the argument prior to this statement is concerned with 'having' spirits and employing them to perform miracles, the Gospel authors obviously intend Jesus' statement to correctly identify the spirit that is in his possession. As a result, Morton Smith suggests:

'the saying shows that at least some Christians were willing to admit that Jesus did 'have a spirit,' but insisted that it was a (or 'the') holy one.'³

The versions presented in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew clearly identify the Holy Spirit as the operative element in Jesus' exorcisms (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31-2) and the Matthean version even reaffirms and reinforces the presence of the Holy Spirit by inserting an additional passage earlier into the account in which Jesus states 'if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons' (Mt. 12:28). Since the implied manipulation of the

³ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978) p. 33.

Holy Spirit in this passage could easily warrant a charge of magic, this statement was, rather unsurprisingly, a cause for alarm for the author of Luke who prefers to replace the Matthean expression πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ ('Spirit of God') with the Old Testament phrase δακτύλῳ θεοῦ ('finger of God', Lk. 11:20) and resituate mention of πνεῦμα later in the story at Lk. 12:10. As Luke regularly uses the terms δύνάμις and πνεῦμα in close relation to one another and makes constant reference to the Holy Spirit throughout his Gospel, some commentators suggest that it is unlikely that he would have altered this reference in his source.⁴ Consequently, the originality of Luke's δακτύλῳ θεοῦ could be proposed on the basis that Matthew may have found a change to πνεῦμα more palatable to avoid anthropomorphism and associate Jesus' miracles more directly with the Holy Spirit.⁵ However, Luke also includes the expression 'hand of the Lord' (χεὶρ κυρίου) many times in Acts as a replacement for 'Spirit' (cf. Acts 4:28-30, 11:21, 13:11), therefore the 'finger of God' may have been understood by the early readers of Luke as being synonymous with 'Spirit of God'.⁶ Similarly, the expression 'finger of God' is understood in the same way as the 'hand of God' in the Old Testament and both were phrases commonly used to describe the power of God.⁷ It has also been proposed that the Luke's alteration was made in order to draw out parallels between the release of the demon-possessed in this

⁴ Whether Luke considered the Holy Spirit to be the source of Jesus' miraculous powers is subject to continual debate in New Testament scholarship (see p. 142 above).

⁵ Alan Richardson, *The Miracle-Stories of the Gospels* (London: SCM, 1941) p. 39.

⁶ James Dunn points out that 'both are ways of describing the powerful action of God' and therefore the difference between the two terms 'may be largely academic' (J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1975) p. 46).

⁷ See Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) p. 457. For examples of the Old Testament use of 'finger of God' (בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים) cf. Ex. 31:18, Dt. 9:10.

passage and the release of the captives in Exodus 8 in which the magicians tell Pharaoh 'this is the finger of God' (בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים, Ex. 8:19).⁸ I would suggest, however, that the author of Luke may have been particularly reluctant to retain Matthew's πνεῦμα in this instance, for as Graham Twelftree notes:

'retaining Spirit here may have given the impression that Jesus 'used' the Holy Spirit to perform exorcisms in the same way that contemporaries used gods or powerful names.'⁹

If the author of Luke replaced the Matthean πνεῦμα with the expression δακτύλῳ θεοῦ in order to distance Jesus from the implied manipulation of the Holy Spirit, then he does more to compound the problem of magical technique in this passage than to diffuse it. For instance, the severe connotations of magical technique that are present within this phrase force John Hull to the astounding conclusion that Matthew must have altered Luke's δακτύλῳ θεοῦ due to the 'association with magical technique which the finger of God had.'¹⁰ The expression 'finger of God' does feature significantly in ancient magic; for example, the phrase δακτύλου [sic] τοῦ θεοῦ appears in a binding charm on an ostrakon translated by Karl Preisendanz in which the magician states 'I swear to you with the finger of God.'¹¹ Furthermore, the 'finger of God' was closely associated with

⁸ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, p. 46.

⁹ Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999) p. 160.

¹⁰ Hull argues that the resulting effect is that 'the only place in the gospels where Jesus seems to be on the point of disclosing his method is thus spiritualised' (John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, (SBT, 2nd Series 28; London: SCM, 1974) p. 129).

¹¹ Text 01 in Karl Preisendanz (ed.), *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, Vol II (Stuttgart: Teubner 1974) p. 233.

Egyptian magical ritual. E. J. Woods suggests that the phrase ‘finger of God’ is an ‘Egyptianism’¹² and when examining the use of the phrase ‘finger of god’ in Exodus 8:19, Thomas Römer comments:

‘This expression, attested in Egyptian magical formulas, undoubtedly points to Aaron’s stick, whose superiority the sorcerers acknowledge.’¹³

Since Aaron was recognised by the Egyptian magicians as a superior magician due to his use of a powerful stick or rod known as the ‘finger of God’, could it be possible to apply a parallel interpretation to Luke’s use of δακτύλῳ θεοῦ in this passage as suggestive of a similar magical tool being used by Jesus? If so, then perhaps it is within this passage that the early Christian artists who depicted Jesus as using a wand found their muse.

In addition to a term referring to a magical tool, the title ‘the finger of God’ is a name that is given to a supernatural power in many ancient magical texts. Marvin Meyer observes that the name ‘Orphamiel’ is ‘well known from other Coptic texts of ritual power and is commonly associated with the index finger of god’s right hand.’¹⁴ To illustrate the association between Orphamiel and God’s finger, Meyer cites from an ancient ostrakon invoking Orphamiel which states: ‘You are Orphamiel, the meaning of which is: the great

¹² E. J. Woods, ‘The “Finger of God” and Pneumatology in Luke-Acts’, *JSNTSup* 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) p. 82. Woods also suggests that the ‘finger of God’ may be an allusion to a magical ring that figures prominently in Jewish magical texts (p. 176).

¹³ Thomas C. Römer, ‘Competing Magicians in Exodus 7-9: Interpreting Magic in the Priestly Theology’ in Todd Klutz (ed.), *Magic in the Biblical world: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, *JSNTsup* 245 (2003) p. 20. To support this statement, Römer provides reference to a useful study by B. Couroyer entitled ‘Le “doigt de Dieu” (Exode, VIII, 15)’, *RB* 63 (1956) pp. 481-95.

¹⁴ Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) p. 230.

finger of the father.’¹⁵ This name appears yet again in a spell from the London Oriental Manuscript 6796 (dated by Walter Crum ‘about the year 600’) which casts out unclean spirits ‘in the power of Orphamiel, the great finger of the right hand of the father!’¹⁶ Later in the same text the exorcist demands: ‘I adjure you, father, by...Orphamiel, that is the great finger of your right hand, that you send me Jesus Christ’.¹⁷ However, Orphamiel is not the only spiritual power to be associated with the finger of God. An amulet to bind a dog (i.e. to keep a dog silent) from the London Oriental Manuscript 1013A invokes ‘the great finger Nathaniel’ to bind a subject:

‘I adjure [you], I place you under oath, by the great finger, Nathaniel:
Bind, bind, bind, unbreakably!’¹⁸

This particular text was most likely used by a thief to restrain a dog so that he could steal from a house (coincidentally, Luke’s δακτύλῳ θεοῦ appears in close proximity to the binding terminology used by Jesus and the metaphor of a plundered house in the parable of the strong man in Mk. 3:27//Mt. 12:29//Lk. 11:21-22).¹⁹

¹⁵ Trans. Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, p. 231.

¹⁶ Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic* p. 279, citing Walter E. Crum *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1905).

¹⁷ Trans. Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, p. 290. See also Meyer’s translation of an amulet to provide protection: ‘I adjure you by Orphamiel, the great finger of the father’ (p. 116).

¹⁸ Trans. Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, p. 250.

¹⁹ Donald Tyson comments: ‘It was far more common for bindings to be made in support of theft than in restraint of it...It is difficult to imagine any other use for such bindings than to aid in housebreaking at night’ (Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. James Freake, ed. Donald Tyson (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1997) p. 119).

The originality of the Lukan δακτύλῳ θεοῦ or the Matthean πνεῦμα does not ultimately determine the presence of magical connotations within this passage since both carry serious implications of magical techniques at work in Jesus' exorcisms. If we accept Hull's suggestion that Matthew altered his received Lukan version of the story from δακτύλῳ θεοῦ to πνεῦμα then this may indicate that Matthew was sensitive to the suggestion that a magical technique or a magical tool was employed by Jesus in his exorcisms. Alternatively, if the author of Luke has altered the Matthean account then it is unlikely that he would consciously include a reference to δακτύλῳ θεοῦ as this phrase carries such a strong magical subtext and great care has been taken by all three Synoptic writers to remove traces of magic from elsewhere in the Gospels. However, Luke may have felt a change was necessary in order to avoid the implication that Jesus had control over the Holy Spirit and that he was able to manipulate it in order to produce miracles, particularly since Matthew does not place evidence of magical spirit manipulation in the words of Jesus' opponents in this instance, but in the words of Jesus himself.

The identification of Jesus' empowering spirit as the 'Holy Spirit' does not discount the possibility of magical practice since divine or 'holy' spirits were commonplace in the ancient world and they were frequently employed by magicians as supernatural assistants. The magical papyri provide numerous examples of rites that can be performed to achieve the possession of a divine spirit and it is by closely examining these instructions that we can rightfully judge whether Jesus' conduct in the Gospels is similar to the behaviour of a magician in possession of a holy spirit. To begin, we can compare the accounts of a magician's acquisition of a divine spirit that are provided in the magical papyri to the

moment in the Gospels in which this spiritual power initially appears to Jesus. Although we have previously considered Jesus' baptism as the moment of passive spirit-possession (Chapter V), we must now reconsider the baptism narratives as an account of his reception of a divine familiar spirit.

The baptism as the endowment of a divine familiar spirit

Although Celsus is particularly keen to stress the influence of Egyptian magic on Jesus' activities, he argues that the coming of the dove and the voice at Jesus' baptism has its parallels in Egyptian magical rituals that anyone could learn to perform.²⁰ The absence of ritual elements in the baptism narratives contradict Celsus' allegation. However, since the Gospel reports of Jesus' healings and exorcisms have been edited to remove physical or verbal techniques that could be misconstrued as having parallels to magical behaviour, we must regard with suspicion the absence of baptismal words or ritual and consider, as Smith proposes, the possibility that we have an abridged version.²¹ If the details of the baptismal rite itself would have been inoffensive to the early reader, then the omission of this material in all three Synoptic accounts is inexplicable. By removing these seemingly harmless details the Gospel authors suggest that they were in some way detrimental to their evangelical objectives. If Smith is correct when he suggests that the details of the baptismal ritual have been removed, then there are three possible reasons for why this may have occurred. The first possibility is that the evangelists simply considered these details to be unnecessary and superfluous clutter in the story and therefore they chose to

²⁰ Origen, *Con. Cels.* I. 46

²¹ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 96, 145.

give preference to the unusual motifs of the dove and descending spirit. Second, the original story may have contained additional factors that were considered to be contentious due to their bizarre imagery. However, as the redactors retain material which uses unusual or mythological language elsewhere in the Gospels, such as in the temptation narrative, we must assume that peculiar or symbolic imagery would not have been a deterrent to the redactor. Finally, since the Gospel writers continually remove potential indicators of magical technique, there is a strong possibility that the ritual elements of the baptism were thought to resemble illicit or magical procedures and they were consequently removed on this basis. If certain elements of the baptism accounts were considered by the evangelists to be too reminiscent of magical practice, then the dove-motif may have been salvaged from a broader chain of events on the basis that it was regarded by the Gospel authors to be a useful device through which to represent the coming of the Holy Spirit to Jesus.

While the dove-motif may have initially proven valuable in representing the bestowal of divine approval upon Jesus, the symbol of the descending dove has since been unable to elude its associations with magic and it is possible that the accusations of spirit manipulation and demonic empowerment made by Jesus' opponents had their foundation in, or were influenced by, the story of a spirit descending to Jesus in the baptismal accounts. Charges of spirit manipulation may have been founded upon the Markan baptism narrative in particular as the Spirit which descends onto Jesus and drives him into the wilderness is simply referred to as an anonymous πνεῦμα (Mk. 1:10, 12). This interpretation is wisely avoided by both the authors of Matthew and Luke. The Spirit that

descends to Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is clearly identified as 'the Spirit of God' (πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ, Mt. 3:16-17), although the Spirit which drives him into the wilderness is once again the simple Markan πνεῦμα (Mt. 4:1). The author of Luke's Gospel ensures that the Spirit is linked unequivocally with God by having the 'Holy Spirit' (πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, Lk. 3:22) descend to Jesus and although it is again a general πνεῦμα that drives Jesus into the wilderness, the evangelist inserts a line before Jesus' expulsion to remove any doubt concerning the identity of the Spirit: 'and Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit' (πνεύματος ἁγίου, Lk. 4:1). The author of the Gospel of John may have been acutely aware that the pericope had the potential to form the basis of a polemical attack against Jesus or his followers as he retains the story, possibly because it was too well known to be omitted, but changes the story into a vision received by John the Baptist (Jn. 1:32-24).²²

Alternatively, rather than being the original source of these allegations, it is entirely reasonable to conclude that this story was constructed as a response to claims from those hostile to Jesus' mission that there was a demonic spirit at work in his healing and exorcistic ministry, hence the great emphasis placed in the Matthean and Lukan accounts on the divine origin of the Spirit present at Jesus' baptism. However, I would suggest that it is highly unlikely that the evangelists deliberately invented the appearance of a spirit as this would have given significant weight to the opponents' claims that Jesus derives his miracle-working abilities from the manipulation of a spiritual power. Furthermore, it is

²² Morton Smith asserts: 'Matthew's attempt to 'explain' the fact and the fourth gospel's attempt to suppress it suggests that it did figure in polemic against [Jesus]' (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 151).

particularly unlikely that they would have chosen the motif of a descending spirit since aerial spirits were closely associated with magical practice in the ancient world.

Augustine addressed the existence of aerial spirits at length in his *City of God* and these spirits appear frequently throughout the Greek magical papyri.²³ In the ‘Spell of Pnouthis for acquiring an assistant spirit’ (PGM I.42 -195), the magician is addressed as ‘O friend of aerial spirits’ (ὦ φίλε ἀερίων πνευμάτων, I. 50) and later in the same manuscript the magician asks to be protected ‘against all excess of magical power of aerial daimon’ (δαίμονος ἀερίου, PGM I. 216). Similarly in a ‘bear charm’ (PGM VII. 686 - 702) the magician encounters a spirit who is addressed as ‘O aerial one’ (ὦ ἀερίᾱ, VII. 699). In addition to spirits that have their natural domain in the air, the descent of a spirit from above is a common occurrence within the magical papyri and this is often the manner in which a familiar spirit appears to a magician. For instance, a magical text entitled ‘a tested charm of Pibechis for those possessed by daimons’ (PGM IV: 3007-86) reads ‘let your angel, the implacable, descend and let him assign the daimon flying around this form’ (IV. 3025-6). Occasionally the familiar spirit appears in the form of a bird; for example in the ‘letter of Nephotes to Psammetichos’ (PGM IV. 154-221) there is a description of a ‘divine encounter’ in which ‘a sea falcon flies down and strikes you on the body with its wings’ (IV. 209-211). As the descent of the spirit at Jesus’ baptism is so extensively paralleled within the magical tradition, Morton Smith asks why this passage was allowed to remain in the Gospels when it could clearly be used as a charge of magic.

²³ Augustine, *City of God*, particularly VIII. 14-18.

He states:

‘objectively there is no more likelihood that the Lord of the Air came down to a magician than there is that the holy spirit came down to Jesus.’²⁴

Although the evangelists emphasise that the spirit in the baptism accounts has a divine nature (Mt. 3:16//Lk. 3:22), this does not conclusively rule out implications of magical practice since ‘holy spirits’ also feature prominently within the magical papyri.²⁵ For example, the incantation in the fragmented text of PGM II. 282-409 (a ‘rite for foreknowledge’) is addressed to a ‘holy spirit’ (ἅγιον πνεῦμα, II.393). Similarly, in the love charm entitled ‘lunar spell of Claudianus’ (PGM VII. 862 – 918) the goddess is able to send out an angel or a ‘holy assistant’ (πάρεδρον ὅσιον) to attract the desired lover to the magician since ‘no aerial (ἀέριος) or infernal daimon’ can ignore the wishes of the goddess’ (PGM VII. 894). In addition, the title ‘Ἀγαθὸς Δαίμων (*Agathos Daimon*)’ appears in a ‘spell to Helios’ (PGM IV. 1596-1715) and a ‘ring blessing’ (PGM XII. 244) and the variant ‘Agathodaimon’ is used in PDM XIV. 605. Although not all familiar spirits in the Greek Magical Papyri were given a title indicating their holy status, many were considered to be of divine origin. Leda Jean Ciruolo reveals in her study of the *paredri* in the Greek magical papyri that ‘in the overwhelming majority of instances the paredros may be considered a divine being’ and that ‘the term which is used most commonly to refer to the paredros is *theos*, meaning a god or a goddess.’²⁶

²⁴ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 100.

²⁵ Morton Smith observes that ‘Holy spirits, with and without the definite article, are familiar in the magical papyri’ (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 103) and he provides references to PGM I. 313; III. 8, 289, 393, 550; IV. 510, XII. 174 (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 193).

²⁶ L. J. Ciruolo ‘Supernatural Assistants in the Greek Magical Papyri’ in M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (eds.) *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Boston: Brill, 1995) p. 280.

The fourth-century spell entitled 'the Spell of Pnouthis' (PGM I. 42 -195) is of particular importance in this instance since many elements within this text parallel the events described in the baptism accounts of the Gospels. First, a spirit descends from heaven in the form of a bird ('a falcon will [fly down and] stand in front of you', I. 65-66) and this spirit is later identified as a godly 'aerial spirit' ('it is acknowledged that he is a god; he is an aerial spirit which you have seen' I. 96). This assisting spirit has many beneficial abilities that are closely paralleled with the miraculous powers attributed to Jesus in the miracle stories of the Gospels:

'he frees from bonds...he opens doors, he causes invisibility...he brings water, wine, bread and whatever you wish in the ways of foods...he will quickly freeze rivers and seas and in such a way that you can run over them firmly...' (PGM I. 100-121).

Although the parallels between this magical text and the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels appear to suggest that the author of this spell was aware of the Gospel tradition, the manifestation of food, freedom from bondage and the granting of invisibility were all magical skills accredited to various magicians within the ancient world. For example, Celsus states that the Egyptian magicians were able to call forth the illusion of a grand banquet²⁷, Lucian's Hyperborean magician has the power to walk upon water²⁸ and Apollonius of Tyana was thought to have vanished from a courtroom.²⁹

²⁷ Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.68.

²⁸ Lucian, *Philopseudes* 13.

²⁹ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* VIII. 5. For more on invisibility and magical escapes from bonds, see Andy M. Reimer, 'Virtual Prison Breaks: Non-Escape Narratives and the Definition of 'Magic'' in Todd Klutz (ed.) *Magic in the Biblical world: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, JSNTsup 245 (2003) pp. 125-139.

When the magician dies, the author of this rite states that the spirit will wrap up his body and 'carry it into the air with him' (I. 178) and during his lifetime, as a direct result of the possession of this assisting spirit, the magician is promised: 'you will be worshipped as a god since you have a god as a friend' (I. 191). As this final line indicates, the close bond established between a magician and his assisting spirit was thought to induce 'god-like' qualities within the magician, although his new divine status could also be illusionary. Since an assisting spirit worked through the magician and at his immediate behest, it would appear to observers that the magician was performing these miracles by his own personal powers and hence his naïve audience would consider him to be a god.

However the magician's divine status was not always a charade. Many rites in Hellenistic magic, known specifically as 'deification' rites, promise to join the magician so closely to a divine spirit or god that his soul will become divine and he will rightfully identify himself as a god. It is in accordance with these particular magical procedures that Morton Smith proposes we can interpret Jesus' baptism as 'an account of a magical rite of deification'.³⁰ Since the baptism accounts in the Gospels closely resemble the descent of a divine familiar spirit and deification was often the direct consequence of the possession of a divine spirit, we must seriously consider Smith's proposal as a valid interpretation of the processes described within the baptism narratives.

³⁰ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 104.

Deification rites and the magician's claim to divinity

The serpent in the Garden of Eden tempts Eve with the promise that if she eats the fruit from the tree of knowledge then she 'will be like God' (Gen. 3:5). The serpent's promise that a human being can achieve a divine status was an appealing prospect in the ancient world and many religious communities and magical practitioners believed that by participating in a deification ritual they could experience a physical and spiritual regeneration which would result in their transformation into a god-like being. Consequently, rites of deification were commonplace in the ancient world³¹ and A. D. Nock comments that the practice in the first century CE 'was often expressed with a boldness which surprises moderns who have been brought up to think of the category of divinity as infinitely remote.'³² Attaining a divine status was considered to be a central objective of theurgy ('divine work', from θεός 'God' and ἔργον 'work'³³) and many theurgists in the Hellenistic world of the late second and early third centuries CE

³¹ The funerary literature of the ancient Egyptians indicates that they thought that humans could be deified. For more on mummification rites and the deification of the dead in Egyptian funerary ceremonies, see E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (New York: Bell, 1991) particularly Chapter VI 'Magical ceremonies' (pp. 182-205). In addition, the Chaldeans believed that the soul became impure when it descended into the body and therefore it must strive to ascend to the heavens where it will be purified and become immortal (see Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman empire*. 2nd ed. by Michel Tardieu (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1978). For a concise study of early Christian doctrine of deification, see Mark D. Nispel, 'Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia', *VC* 53. 3 (1999) pp. 289-304 and a broad survey of deification techniques is provided in Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001), chapter 5 (pp. 70-85).

³² A. D. Nock, 'Review of Meecham's *Epistle to Diognetus*', *JR* 31 (1951) p. 214.

³³ Georg Luck defines 'theourgia' as 'working on the gods' or 'making the gods work' (Georg Luck, 'Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature' in V. Flint, R. Gordon, G. Luck and D. Ogden (eds.) *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, vol. 2 (London: Athlone Press, 1999) p. 101).

professed the ability to establish a direct link of communication between themselves and the gods.³⁴ A close involvement with the operations of the divine ensured that the theurgists were considered to be practising a higher, more benevolent form of magic than inferior magic such as goetia and henceforth the rituals of theurgy were adopted by leading Neoplatonic philosophers seeking to distance themselves from the negative stigma associated with magic.³⁵

Many examples of deification rites are found within the Greek magical papyri and the most widely recognised of these is the 'Mithras Liturgy' in the Great Magical Papyri of Paris (PGM IV. 475-829). This ritual promises the magician that he will attain immortality and be transformed into 'a lord of a godlike nature' (PGM IV. 220). To indicate the transition of the magician's soul from a mortal to divine state, he is required to announce during the ritual:

'for today I am to behold, with immortal eyes – I, born mortal from mortal womb, but transformed by tremendous power' (PGM IV. 516).

³⁴ E. R. Dodds draws parallels between theurgy and modern Spiritualism, indicating that both are concerned with establishing communication with spirits. The theurgists, however, are not concerned with contacting the dead but with contacting the gods (E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press, 1951) appendix 1).

³⁵ The contrast between *therugy* as good magic and *goetia* as evil magic is made by A. A. Barb who states: '[Religion] deteriorates into so-called white magic (the Greeks called it *theurgia* - working things divine), gradually losing its whiteness and turning from more or less dirty grey into black magic, called in Greek *goetia*, from the evil-sounding recitation of spells' (A. A. Barb, 'The Survival of the Magic Arts' in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. by Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) p. 101). For more on the practice of theurgy, see Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman empire*. 2nd ed. by Michel Tardieu (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1978).

Although many deification rituals claim to produce a genuine change in the participant's status, it is often difficult to distinguish between occasions in which a legitimate spiritual transformation has occurred resulting from the successful completion of a deification ritual and the magician's deceptive declaration that he is to be identified with a god in order to gain power and authority over the spirits that he is attempting to manipulate. Often the magician in the Greek magical papyri will identify himself using an 'I am' formula coupled with the name of a deity or a biblical individual of powerful status. For example, the performer of the rite in PGM III. 145 states 'I am Adam the forefather' and similarly in PGM V. 109 we read 'I am Moses'. In later magical manuscripts we find 'I am Jesus Christ' ('Spell to cast out every unclean spirit', London Oriental Manuscript 6796 (4), 6796). John Hull claims that 'the very common magical device of pretending to be a god...is Egyptian in origin'³⁶ and this is supported by the prevalence of Egyptian names within the magical papyri. For instance, the magician in PDM XIV. 239-95 declares 'I am Isis; I shall bind him. I am Osiris; I shall bind him. I am Anubis; I shall bind him' (XIV. 255) and PGM I. 247-62 ('a tested spell for invisibility') reads 'I am Anubis, I am Osir-phre...I am Osiris whom Seth destroyed (ΑΝΟΚ ΑΝΟΥΤΙ ΑΝΟΚ ΟΥΣΙΡΦΡΗ...ΑΝΟΚ ΠΕ ΟΥΣΙΡΕ ΠΕΝΤΑ ΣΗΤ ΤΑΚΟ).'

Witnesses to these statements could easily confuse the magician's claim to an alter-identity with the alter-persona speech typically associated with spirit-possession and thereby conclude that the magician is possessed by the spirit of a god or powerful

³⁶ John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (SBT 2nd Series 28; London: SCM, 1974) p. 28. Similarly Fowden states that self-identification with a deity is an 'authentically Egyptian trait' (Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: a historical approach to the late pagan mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 26).

individual who is reaffirming his identity through the speech of the possessed magician. If a genuine transformation of the participant has occurred then we can allow the possibility that a new persona is present and therefore the spirit-possession model can be rightfully applied. However, although a declaration of a divine status made within the magical papyri may be an authentic indication that the magician has achieved a divine-state through the successful completion of a deification rite, it is most often the case that by making these bold statements the magician is aware that an identity change has not occurred and he is simply adopting an alter-identity in order to accord himself a greater status and thereby add power to his spell. Since these 'I am' statements are almost invariably made when addressing a spirit over which the magician is seeking to gain control, it appears that these statements are a sort of 'play-acting' in which the magician simply pretends that he has a superior status and no real psychological transformation has taken place. Therefore when the magician announces 'I am...' we should not immediately assume, as Stephen Davies does, that this indicates that a change of persona has occurred and that the magician is now possessed by an imposing spiritual force.³⁷ Consequently we must be suspicious of individuals in antiquity who make forthright statements such as 'I am the Son of God' or who profess to have obtained a divine status and we must consider whether these individuals genuinely believe that they have been transformed into a god-like being or whether they are simply making an arrogant claim to superiority such as those made by the magicians in the magical papyri.

³⁷ S. L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance and the Origins of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1995) pp. 154ff.

'Son of God' as a means of magical self-identification

All four Gospel writers indicate that Jesus' claim to a divine status was a major contributing factor towards his eventual execution (Mk. 14:61-64//Mt. 26:63-65//Lk. 22:70). For instance, in the trial narrative of John's Gospel a charge of blasphemy is made against Jesus on the basis that he has assumed a divine-like nature:

'This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God.' (Jn. 5:18)

'the Jews say "it is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you being a man, made yourself God."' (Jn. 10:33)

'the Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself a Son of God."' (Jn. 19:7)

Blasphemy is divided into three categories in the Talmud; the first is insulting god, the second is idolatry and the third is 'stretching out the hand to God'.³⁸ This third category forbids individuals from assuming a god-like nature or considering themselves to be equal with the divine and it appears to be on this particular indictment that Jesus' opponents seek to impose a charge of blasphemy. When we consider the fact that magicians in the ancient world were actively seeking ways in which to attain a divine status or transform themselves into gods, then it is clear that the Jewish people not only charge Jesus with blasphemy but also with practicing magic. In addition, John 19:7

³⁸ This third category of blasphemy and its relevance to the charges brought against Jesus is discussed in Tibor Horvath, 'Why was Jesus Brought to Pilate?', *NovT* 11 (1969) pp. 174-184.

explicitly states that the Jews sought to execute Jesus because he 'made himself a Son of God.' Although the emphasis placed upon Jesus' sonship throughout John's Gospel is indicative of the high christological objectives of its author, the title 'Son of God' is also closely associated with the person of Jesus in the Synoptics and often appears in connection with supernatural events (cf. Mk. 3:11; Mt. 4:3, 14:33). At the risk of oversimplification, New Testament academia commonly interprets the Father-Son terminology used by the Gospel authors as indicative of a parent-child or dominant-subordinate relationship, illustrating the hierarchical relation between Jesus and God.³⁹ The word 'son' has a similar usage in the magical papyri since it is generally used as an affectionate term for an initiate or pupil. For example, in the 'spell of Pnouthis' (PGM I. 42-195) the magician is forbidden from sharing the magical instructions detailed in the text with anyone 'except [your] legitimate son' (I. 193). Similarly, in PGM IV. 2505-2517 the author urges the performer to 'keep it secret, son' (IV. 2517) and Betz writes in his comments on this statement that 'the term 'son' seems to indicate the magician's apprentice.'⁴⁰ However, a claim to sonship is also made by a magician engaging in the alter-persona play-acting encountered above. For instance, a parallel to the statement 'I am the son of god' (Jn. 10:36) occurs in the Mithras Liturgy (PGM IV. 475-829) during which the magician asks that 'the holy spirit (ἱερόν πνεῦμα⁴¹) may breathe in me' (IV. 510) and he subsequently declares 'for I am the son' (ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ὁ υἱός, IV. 535). This

³⁹ Hengel describes the Old Testament use of בֶּן ('son') as 'an expression of subordination' and used 'to express belonging to God' (M. Hengel, *Son of God: The Origins of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (London: SCM, 1976) p. 21).

⁴⁰ Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation including the Demotic Spells*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1992) p. 84.

⁴¹ Betz translates ἱερόν πνεῦμα in this passage as 'sacred spirit' (Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, p. 48).

‘son’ terminology also appears in the Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden, in which the magician states: ‘I am the son of the living god’ (DMP XX.33). In order to demonstrate how other statements concerning Jesus’ divine origin resemble the outlandish claims made by the magicians in the magical papyri, Morton Smith draws attention to the similarity between passages in John’s Gospel and the magical papyri; for example, ‘I am the one come down from heaven’ (Jn. 6:51) is identical to ‘I am the one come forth from heaven’ (PGM IV. 1018) and ‘I am the truth’ (Jn. 14:6) is identical to ‘I am the truth’ (PGM V. 148).⁴²

The magician who declares ‘I am the Son of God’ suggests to his audience that either his soul has been deified through the possession of a divine spirit or upon completion of a deification rite and he is now to be identified as a divine being, or that he is pretending to be associated with a god, or to be the son of a god, in order to elevate his magical authority within the spiritual realm. Either option clearly indicates that the individual has engaged in, or continues to engage in, magical activities that were commonplace within the first centuries. Magicians who had successfully gained control over divine powers, either by harnessing the obedience of a god, being in possession of a divine spirit or even possessing divine powers themselves, were often recognised by their wild claims that the boundaries of their powers are unlimited and that they are able to behave like the gods, performing miracles at will and achieving wonders no matter how impossible the task. Therefore an overriding confidence in the strength and potency of the magician’s own will was a major indicator of spiritual manipulation in the ancient world.

⁴² For further examples see Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, pp. 125-126.

The coercive will of the magician

Simon Magus in the *pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* brags that ‘whatever I will to do I shall be able to do’.⁴³ This egotistical boast was echoed in the words of many magicians in antiquity who believed that their authoritative command alone would suffice to produce immediate wonders and spectacle. Amongst the numerous historical and literary examples cited by Sharyn Echols Dowd which demonstrate the magician’s confidence in the strength of his own will, one striking example is taken from a second-century papyrus which reads:

‘if I command the moon, it will come down; and if I will (θελήσω) to delay the day, the night stays for me...And if I will (θελήσω) to sail the sea I do not need a ship; and if I will to go through the air I shall be made light...’⁴⁴

In both the magical papyri and the fictional literature describing the exploits of the magicians in antiquity, it is frequently uncertain whether the magician’s ability to perform ‘whatever he wills’ is drawn from the strength of his own powers, which are effective independently of spiritual assistance, or from the immediate compliance of a spiritual being over which the magician has assumed command at an earlier occasion. A magician who deems himself capable of bringing down the moon without the need for spiritual intervention, as described in the example above, must believe that the strength of his power is situated in his own personal, manistic powers. It is the magician’s self-

⁴³ Clement, *Recognitions of Clement*, 2:9.

⁴⁴ Sharyn Echols Dowd, *Prayer, Power and the Problem of Suffering* (SBL Dissertation Series 105, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) p. 138. The translation reproduced here is from Campbell Bonner, ‘A papyrus describing magical powers,’ *Trans. American Philological Association* 52 (1921) pp. 116-7.

sufficient ability to perform miracles by his actions alone, particularly spoken ones, that is addressed by Apuleius who states: 'a magician (*magum*) is a person who... is able, by a certain incredible power centred in his incantations, to do everything he wills'.⁴⁵ Similarly, the application of the magician's will independently of spiritual assistance is addressed by John Hull who comments:

'the strongest magic seems to be that effect caused merely by the will of the operator; so strong is that will that it needs no extra help...it cannot be interrupted or delayed because its triumph is its immediate attainment of its objective.'⁴⁶

Conversely, the ability to perform miracles seemingly at will and without the need for external assistance was also accredited to magicians who had acquired the assistance of a spirit or god which would react immediately to the magician's summons, thereby giving the impression that the magician himself was the instigator and executor of the impossible task. An example of this method is found in the 'Spell of Pnouthis' (PGM I. 42- 195) which instructs the magician that he need not offer lengthy petitions or perform complicated rites whenever he wishes to perform an impossible task since the spirit is bound to help him immediately whenever he wills it (PGM I. 180 -187). Therefore, to his audience, the resulting action will appear to have been achieved without the aid of a spiritual intermediary.

With the possession of an assisting spirit and the magician's overriding confidence in the strength of his own will constituting clear indications of magical practice in antiquity, it

⁴⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 26.

⁴⁶ Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, p. 55.

was essential that miracle-workers demonstrated that their miracles resulted not from their own personal power or from the assistance of a compelled spirit, but from their prayers to God who ultimately had the final word in whether the requested task would be carried out. For this reason, the miracle-workers and their followers were keen to point out that the only method used in their wonder-working was faithful and pious prayer and hence they were devout worshippers of God rather than magicians.⁴⁷ If the evangelists were equally keen to represent Jesus as an obedient worshipper of God then it is surprising that there is no record of a prayer to God during the healing or exorcism accounts in the Gospels. Although Graham Twelftree suggests that prayer is accredited to Jesus in the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:41-2), he concedes that on this occasion the prayer does not form part of the healing but instead acts as a thanksgiving for the benefit of the surrounding onlookers.⁴⁸

Although prayers are noticeably absent in the healing miracles, the reader is made acutely aware that Jesus can obtain immediate help from God. This is the functional understanding of Jesus' power that is provided by Martha who states: 'even now I know

⁴⁷ In his authoritative book on the life of Apollonius of Tyana, G. R. S. Mead writes: 'Apollonius believed in prayer, but how differently from the vulgar. For him the idea that the Gods could be swayed from the path of rigid justice by the entreaties of men, was a blasphemy; that the Gods could be made parties to our selfish hopes and fears was to our philosopher unthinkable', therefore 'we find Apollonius indignantly rejecting the accusation of magic ignorantly brought against him...with such arts he would have nothing to do...but owing to 'that wisdom which God reveals to the wise' ([Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*] iv. 44)' (G. R. S. Mead, *Apollonius of Tyana: The Philosopher-Reformer of the First Century A. D.* (New York: University Books, 1966) pp. 132, 114).

⁴⁸ Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) p. 163. Dowd suggests that when Jesus looks up to heaven (ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν) during the feeding miracle of Mk. 6:41 and when healing the deaf mute in Mk. 7:34, both of these gestures should be understood as a prayer gesture (Dowd, *Prayer, Power and the Problem of Suffering*, p. 119).

that whatever you ask from God, God will give you' (Jn. 11:22). As we have discovered when investigating the healing of the woman with the haemorrhage in Mk. 5:25-34//Mt. 9:18-22//Lk. 8:43-48, various attempts have been made to explain the continual absence of Jesus' request for assistance from God by suggesting that the evangelists understood that Jesus had achieved such a close union with God that a request was unnecessary since God was simply ready and willing to help. It is this immediate nature of God's power that has led some scholars to conclude that Jesus was a charismatic type.⁴⁹ However, an absence of prayer and the expectation of an immediate result also implies an arrogance regarding Jesus' spiritual power-source that was typical of a magician actively manipulating divine powers in the ancient world. The magician in possession of a divine spirit was assured that the spirit operating under his authority would react immediately to perform a miracle at his request, therefore protracted prayers or incantations were unnecessary. Equally, the magician who claimed that he had achieved a divine status believed that an appeal to an external power-source was redundant as the strength of his will alone could perform miracles. Jesus fits comfortably into both of these magical frameworks in the account of the cursing of the fig tree in Mk. 11:12-24//Mt. 21:18-22. The autonomy of Jesus' power-source is severely questioned in this passage and Jesus shifts from the embodiment of a miracle-worker at the mercy of higher divine power to

⁴⁹ For example, James Dunn states: 'his authority was charismatic also in the sense that it was immediately received from God, or rather *was the immediate authority of God.*' (Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* p. 79). Likewise, C. K. Barrett observes: 'In view of the complete unity between the Father and the Son there is no need for uttered prayer at all' (C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1979) p. 402. Also Graham Twelftree: 'the charismatic force of the exorcist was believed to be sufficiently powerful so that what he said or did was of little or no importance in his success' (Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 22).

that of a magician, frivolously exploiting his divine powers and bragging that the strength of his will alone can suffice to produce miracles.

The coercive will of Jesus and the cursing of the fig tree (Mk. 11:12-24//Mt. 21:18-22)

The cursing of the fig tree in Mk. 11:12-24//Mt. 21:18-22 combines a powerful demonstration of Jesus' ἐξουσία with an apparently destructive misuse of his miracle-working powers, all directly linked with a teaching regarding the potency of the operator's will. The harmful application of Jesus' power in this passage stands in sharp contrast to the compassionate use of his abilities throughout the rest of the Synoptics and theories which appeal to Jesus' benevolent motives in his miracle-working as a major defence against magical practice are herein presented with a serious stumbling block.⁵⁰ The first half of the story goes as follows: Jesus encounters a fig tree on the way to Jerusalem that is not bearing fruit and since he is hungry, he curses the tree. In the Matthean account the tree withers on the same day (Mt. 21:19), perhaps in order to enhance the strength of Jesus power, however in the Markan version the disciples and Jesus do not notice that the tree has withered until they pass by the next morning (Mk. 11:20). As the author of Mark tells us that 'it was not the season for figs' (Mk. 11:13), the reader is made aware that the absence of figs on the tree is natural and explicable and that the tree is not dead or failing. Since the tree cannot be held accountable for its lack of

⁵⁰ For example, in defending Jesus' activities against Celsus' claim that they resemble those of the Egyptian magicians, Origen states that Jesus uses his powers to encourage faith and perform good deeds whereas the Egyptian magicians indulge in deeds of self-interest and evil (Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.68, 7.17, 8.43). Similarly, the Sanhedrin stated that an act which has beneficial results cannot be magic (bSanh 67b).

fruit, Jesus' anger is purely the result of his hunger and personal need. Jesus wants and the tree cannot provide, therefore it is destroyed.

Various explanations for this tantrum-like behaviour have been proposed. Some suggest that the withering of the tree is a pedagogical device and that it demonstrates the importance of bearing good spiritual 'fruit'.⁵¹ Others suggest that the story has developed out of a parable.⁵² The most widely accepted interpretation of the passage in New Testament scholarship is that the fig tree is a symbol for Israel and that by cursing it, Jesus is foreshadowing the destruction of the temple.⁵³ Regardless of the motives underlying the inclusion of this story, the tantrum-like behaviour of Jesus within this passage has caused a considerable degree of discomfort and controversy for both ancient redactor and modern scholar alike.⁵⁴ Philip Esler, in his study of Mk. 11:12-14, rather amusingly suggests that the passage 'has the appearance of an alarming fit of pique'.⁵⁵

⁵¹ William Telford raises an important question for those interpreting the passage as having a symbolic meaning: 'in claiming that Mark's story was intended to have a symbolic function, we are at once confronted with a serious objection. It has frequently been pointed out, with justice, that vv. 22-26 of the sequel do not appear to interpret the fig-tree story in a symbolical or allegorical light' (William R. Telford, 'The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree in Mark's Gospel and its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition', *JSOTSup* 1 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980) p. 49).

⁵² Graham Stanton, 'Message and Miracles' in Markus Bockmuehl (ed.) *Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 67.

⁵³ Cf. Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentary (MA: Hendrickson, 1991) p. 261-265; Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 31; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977) pp. 127-39.

⁵⁴ This, incidentally, favours its authenticity. For example, Richard H. Hiers states that 'the very objectionable character of this verse speaks for its antiquity' (Richard H. Hiers, 'Not the Season for Figs', *JBL* 87 (1968) p. 394).

⁵⁵ Philip F. Esler, 'The Incident of the Withered Fig Tree in Mark 11: A New Source and Redactional Explanation', *JSNT* 28.1 (2005) p. 47.

Certainly Jesus appears in this passage more like the image presented of him as a child in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, reacting violently to incidents which offend him by using his powers for destructive means (which, incidentally, on one occasion involves ‘withering’ another child (3:1-4)). That the power-authority which Jesus and his disciples share can be used for destructive purposes is clearly how it is understood by James and John who ask Jesus in Lk. 9:54 when confronted with the rejection of the Samaritans: ‘do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?’.

It is possible that the authors of Mark and Matthew found the violence within the fig tree pericope to be disagreeable but felt that the event was too well known or important to be left out. Unsurprisingly, the author of Luke does not include the incident in his Gospel and this omission may be based on his sensitivity to the negative implications of this seemingly random act of destruction. Alternatively, Brent Kinman comments on the omission of this passage in Luke:

‘since many magicians and sorcerers were engaged in wonderworking activities similar to the fig tree cursing, Luke may have felt the account cast Jesus in a bad light.’⁵⁶

Certainly the destructive use of Jesus’ power conjures up the unpleasant caricature of a magician who uses his abilities to bring physical, psychological or financial harm to his neighbours. It must also be noted that the act of ‘withering’ was closely associated with magic in the ancient world. Morton Smith observes that ‘some spells intend their victims

⁵⁶ B. Kinman, ‘Lucan Eschatology and the Missing Fig Tree’, *JBL* 113. 4 (1994) p. 674.

to 'wither,' 'consume,' 'burn up' and therefore 'magic has probably had some influence here'.⁵⁷ Since 'withering' was particularly associated with the 'evil eye', it is perhaps within this context that we can understand the influence of magic upon this passage in the Gospels. For instance, Eric Eve calls the destruction of the fig tree 'an act of thaumaturgical vandalism' which 'in that culture might very well be ascribed to the use of the evil eye'⁵⁸ and he supports this observation with a quotation from Regina Dionisopoulos-Mass' study into the use of the evil eye in witchcraft:

'A tree or vine that suddenly withers is certainly the victim of the eye... There are many tales of trees and vines that were green and strong in the morning but that had withered and died from a passing envious eye by nightfall.'⁵⁹

Alan Dundes, in his authoritative study on this phenomenon, attributes the 'withering' force of the evil eye to the eye's ability to 'dry up' any liquid that serves to sustain life, i.e. the milk from women or female animals and the semen from men.⁶⁰ Hence the evil eye could draw out the water from fruit and cause it to wither on trees.⁶¹ In addition, the statement 'may no fruit ever come from you again' (Mt. 21:19/Mk. 11:14) is similar to the binding curses found within the magical papyri which read, for example, 'may NN not be able...' or 'let him not speak' (cf. PGM V. 321f). Therefore we should not ignore the possibility that Jesus' words are to be understood as a magical binding curse.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 119.

⁵⁸ Eric Eve, 'Meier, Miracle and Multiple Attestation', *JSHJ* 3.1 (2005) p. 33.

⁵⁹ Regina Dionisopoulos-Mass, 'The Evil Eye and Bewitchment in a Peasant Village', in Clarence Maloney (ed.), *The Evil Eye* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976) pp. 49-50.

⁶⁰ Dundes writes: 'the point is that the most common effect of the evil eye is a *drying up* process' (Alan Dundes, 'Wet and Dry: the Evil Eye' in Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye: A Casebook* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) p. 274).

⁶¹ 'If the object attacked is a cow, its milk may dry up; if a plant or a fruit tree, it may suddenly wither and die' (Dundes, 'Wet and Dry: The Evil Eye', p. 258).

This destructive use of Jesus' power and the numerous parallels to the magical act of 'withering' are not the sole contributing factors to the emergent figure of Jesus as a magician in this passage. In addition, there is a significant underlying current of magical technique that is present in the subsequent prayer teaching in Mk. 11:22-24//Mt. 21:21-22. Most studies of the fig-tree incident limit their attention to the implied symbolism of the fig tree and fail to realise that the destruction of the tree is clearly intended to illustrate the subsequent prayer teaching in which Jesus teaches the disciples that they will be able to perform whatever they wish if they pray correctly and with sufficient faith (Mk. 11:22-24//Mt. 21:21-22). In the Matthean version of the prayer teaching, the endowment of power through prayer is dependent upon the πίστις ('faith') of the pray-er, therefore Jesus states 'whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith' (Mt. 21:22). Faith is also the essential element of prayer in an earlier passage in Mt. 17:20:

'Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.'

Due to the ambiguous use of πίστις in both Mt. 17:20 and 21:22, it is unclear whether these passages teach the importance of faith *in oneself* or faith *in God*. Since the prayer is addressed to the *mountain* in both Mt. 17:20, 21:21 and Mk. 11:23 rather than to God, this suggests that God does not have a role in the process and consequently the faith that is required is the pray-er's faith in his own skills and abilities. Similarly, as the tree uproots itself directly in obedience to the pray-er in the Lukan version of the mustard

seed teaching, this clearly suggests that it is the pray-er himself who has the ability to uproot the sycamine tree and that this miracle can be achieved independently of a higher spiritual power:

‘if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree ‘be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,’ *and it would obey you.*’
(my emphasis, Lk. 17:6).

In the Markan version of the fig tree pericope, the πίστις of the pray-er is understood unequivocally as having faith in one’s own words and actions and these are the factors that are required to achieve a miracle. The author of Mark states that a miracle will occur if the pray-er ‘does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass’ (ἀλλὰ πιστεύῃ ὅτι ὃ λαλεῖ γίνεται, Mk. 11:23). The obvious connotations of magical instruction that are present in this statement are softened by the evangelist who introduces the importance of prayer in the following verse (11:24), however the confidence in the operator’s ability to receive miracle-working power through his will alone is made increasingly explicit in the second half of the verse which states that the pray-er must simply ‘believe that you have received it, and it will be yours’.⁶² This confidence in a guaranteed response from God is also echoed elsewhere in the Gospels in the statement ‘ask and it will be given you’ (Lk. 11:9, Mt. 7:7), a phrase which Morton Smith claims has parallels within the magical papyri.⁶³

⁶² Dowd suggests that due to the demanding nature of Mk. 11:23, the defensive nature of verse 24 may have been an attempt ‘to protect Christian miracle-workers against charges of magic’ (Dowd, *Prayer, Power and the Problem of Suffering*, p. 64, n. 41).

⁶³ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 131. Smith provides references to PGM IV. 777f: ‘Ask the god whatever you wish and he will give it you’ and PGM IV. 2172: ‘What you ask, you shall receive’ (p. 206).

The words of Jesus in Mk. 11:23 have a certain arrogance to them that imitates those of the ancient magician who believes that his words alone will suffice to produce miracles and that the gods are bound to his every whim. B. W. Bacon notes with regard to this verse that 'prayer [is regarded as] a spell which, if properly applied, can override the divinely appointed order of things' and therefore this teaching is 'an encouragement to fanaticism.'⁶⁴ Having refused in the temptation narratives to perform magical feats for self-gain or to test the potency of his powers (Mt. 4:3-11/Lk. 4:3-13), here we have Jesus boasting to the disciples that he can do whatever he wills to do and actively using his power to achieve frivolous results. Equally, having taught the disciples 'do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you' (Lk. 10:20) in an attempt to subdue their enthusiasm concerning their new found abilities, here Jesus appears to be randomly exploiting his powers for his own amusement. Furthermore, by having Jesus instruct the disciples regarding the technicalities of his *own* abilities to perform miracles (hence the physical display of his power by withering the fig tree) the author of Mark implies that this miracle-working power can be shared by anyone who is instructed in the methodology and technique used by Jesus. Not only does the transferable nature of this power carry serious implications for magical practice but since Jesus' instructions to his disciples are typically carried out in secret throughout the Gospels, we may ask whether previous occasions in which Jesus has withdrawn with his disciples to impart secret knowledge to them involved the teaching of similar magical techniques.

⁶⁴ B. W. Bacon, *The Beginnings of Gospel Story* (New Haven: Yale University, 1904) p. 163.

If the reader of the Gospels is to understand that an impossible task, such as moving a mountain, can be achieved on the strength of will alone, then is the reader to assume that equally impossible tasks that are reported in the ministry of Jesus, such as healing the sick, walking on the water and transforming water into wine, were also performed on the strength of Jesus' will? While certain 'impossible' miracles attributed to Jesus in the Gospels have clear parallels within the magical tradition⁶⁵, there are undoubtedly instances in which a healing appears to take place simply because Jesus wills it to happen. For example, the leper who approaches Jesus to be healed begs 'if you will, you can make me clean' and Jesus' healing command in all three Synoptics is simply 'I will (θέλω); be clean' (Mk. 1:40-45//Mt. 8:2-4//Lk. 5:12-16). The healing potency of Jesus' will in this instance is made more explicit in the account provided in the Egerton Gospel which omits the mention of touch:

“If, therefore, you are willing, I am cleansed.” The Lord said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” And immediately the leprosy left him.”⁶⁶

If in order to perform a miracle, the disciples must simply 'believe that you have received it, and it will be yours' (Mk. 11:24) then this could account for occasions within the Gospels whereby an individual's faith in a cure appears to be the effective factor in their salvation. For instance, the haemorrhaging woman in Mk. 5:28//Mt. 9:21 believes that if

⁶⁵ For example, we have read earlier in this chapter (pg. 285) that the assisting spirit in the 'Spell of Pnouthis' (PGM 1.42-195) can make food appear and grant the magician the ability to become invisible and walk on water. We have also considered that some of these skills were attributed to Celsus' Egyptian magicians, Lucian's Hyperborean magician and Apollonius of Tyana.

⁶⁶ Papyrus Egerton 2.2 (trans. Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 134).

she can just touch Jesus' clothing then she will be healed and this confidence facilitates her healing, which appears to be achieved independently of a bestowal of power from Jesus. Similarly, Jesus tells the possessed boy's father in Mk. 9:23 that 'all things are possible to the one who believes'⁶⁷ and when Peter begins to sink in the water when attempting to walk on the sea, Jesus says to him 'O man of little faith, why did you doubt?' (Mt. 14:31).

The possibility that a strong personal will is the sole prerequisite for the performance of a miracle is rejected by the author of the Gospel of John who is particularly eager to stress that Jesus does not have autonomy in the application of his spiritual power and prefers instead to repeatedly emphasise Jesus' dependence on God's will. The statement 'I can do nothing on my own authority' reoccurs frequently throughout the Gospel of John (5:30, 8:28, 14:10, cf. also 5:19) and the onslaught of passages in which Jesus reaffirms that he is subject to God's will is occasionally so intense that it arouses suspicion as to whether this material is magic apologetic (cf. Jn. 4:34, 7:17). The highest concentration of these anti-magical assertions is found Jn. 6:38-40:

'For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.' (my emphasis)

⁶⁷ Paul Achtemeier suggests that it is *Jesus* who believes in Mk. 9:23 (Paul J. Achtemeier, 'Miracles and the Historical Jesus', *CBQ* 37 (1975) p. 480.

This relentless importance placed on Jesus' submission to the will of God suggests that the author of John is attempting to suppress implications that Jesus had complete autonomy in the use of his miracle-working powers. However, dependence upon a higher spiritual power contradicts the observations made by Jesus' followers and opponents alike that he has total authority over the application of these powers, especially those made by the centurion in Mt. 8:5-13//Lk. 7:1-10 (See Chapter V). Furthermore, episodes in which Jesus states 'I can do nothing on my own authority' stand in complete contrast to the prayer teaching in Mk. 11:22-24//Mt. 21:21-22 in which it is the pray-er himself who initiates the miracle and achieves the final result. The conflict between the Johannine emphasis on Jesus' submission to the will of God and the arrogant will of Jesus in the Synoptics (as encountered in the fig tree pericope) is clearly apparent in Jn. 5:19-21 in which Jesus meekly states 'the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing' (Jn. 5:19) only to have the egotistical nature of the magician resurface in the very next sentence: 'Even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it' (Jn. 5:21). An element of self-importance in Jesus' words is pointed out by James Dunn who notes that there is 'a self-consciousness and self reference about Jesus' teaching' that is not found elsewhere in the tradition.⁶⁸ To illustrate this, James Dunn contrasts statements such as 'thus says the Lord' with Jesus' self-regarding 'but I say to you' and he compares Isa. 40:6 'but the word of our God will stand forever' with Jesus' words in Mk. 13:31: 'but my words will not pass away.'⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, p. 79.

⁶⁹ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, p. 79.



Since an arrogant faith in one's own will and the assurance of a guaranteed response are both states of mind that were typically associated with the magician in the ancient world, by teaching that his words and actions can bring about guaranteed results or that God will respond immediately to his summons, Jesus steps very firmly into the realm of magic and begins to speak like a magician. As a sharp distinction is often drawn between the religious man who reveres his god and entrusts his prayers to the will of the deity and the magician who makes egotistical and coercive attempts to petition his god to accomplish whatsoever he desires immediately and automatically, evidence in the words of Jesus himself, as provided by the evangelists, which could be construed as being directly coercive towards God would be valuable confirmation of a magical mind-set. The likelihood of discovering such evidence in the Gospels is very doubtful, especially since Jesus' prayers to God are often shrouded with a secretive and mysterious quality (see Chapter III) and any material which implies spiritual manipulation would most certainly have been edited out by the evangelists. Nevertheless, one passage in the Gospels that offers a rare glimpse into Jesus' communication with God is the prayer scene in Gethsemane. Not only does this passage contain traces of spiritual coercion, but it also heralds the dramatic failure of the prayer teaching in Mk. 11:22-24//Mt. 21:21-22 and raises questions concerning a power struggle between Jesus and his spiritual power-source.

The failure of the will at Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32-42//Mt. 26:36-46//Lk. 22:39-46) and on the cross (Mk. 15:34//Mt. 27:46)

‘Let us lie in wait for the righteous man...
He professes to have knowledge of God,
and calls himself a child of the Lord...
and boasts that God is his father.
Let us see if his words are true,
and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;
for if the righteous man is God’s son, he will help him,
and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.’

~ *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 2:12a, 13, 16b-18~

Throughout the Synoptic narratives, Jesus is portrayed as trusting in the will of God and accepting the reality of his own passion predictions. The reader of the Gospels would therefore presume that Jesus was fully prepared for the fulfilment of this prophecy and that he would bravely confront his fate and submit to the will of God. Instead he appears in Gethsemane cowering in great fear and distress, a condition that is emphasised by the author of Mark who offers a rare insight into Jesus’ emotions by using the verb ἐκθαμβείσθαι, a term which denotes extreme fear and anguish (Mk. 14:33).⁷⁰ Having withdrawn from the disciples to pray, Jesus immediately falls upon the ground in the Markan version (ἔπιπεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, Mk. 14:35) and on upon his face in the Matthean version (ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ, Mt. 26:39) and both of these gestures indicate a submissive and desperate approach to God that does not appear elsewhere within the

⁷⁰ Cf. Lohmeyer: ‘the Greek words (ἐκθαμβείσθαι καὶ ἀδύναμις) portray the uttermost degree of boundless terror and suffering’ (E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963) p. 314).

Gospels.⁷¹ In contrast, the author of Luke is reluctant to reveal too much regarding Jesus' emotional state and he has Jesus simply kneel down to pray (Lk. 22:41), however the supplementary verse 44 that is added by some ancient authorities emphasises the distress and fervour in which Jesus prays: 'and being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling upon the ground.'

Surely the evangelists must have realised that there was an enormous discrepancy here between the self-confident Jesus who acknowledges his impending fate throughout the Gospels and the fearful Jesus who begs God for salvation from his impending death in Gethsemane? The author of John appears to be aware of this inconsistency and he chooses instead to present a stronger and more resolute Jesus who rejects the temptation to make a request for salvation and confidently accepts his messianic fate by stating 'what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour' (Jn. 12:27).

Since the evangelists indicate that Jesus is capable of summoning this spiritual power whenever it is required (cf. the healing of the centurion's servant in Mt. 8:5-13//Lk 7:1-10), the reader of the Gospels can safely assume that Jesus is able to draw upon spiritual powers with guaranteed and immediate results. If Jesus had previously been accustomed to receiving immediate spiritual assistance, then the sudden termination of this magical ability may account for his distressed and helpless condition in Gethsemane and his

⁷¹ Dowd points out that 'reports of Jesus' emotions are rare in the Markan narrative, and never up to this point has the audience had any indication that Jesus felt distress about his own situation' (Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering*, p. 153).

desperate attempt to manipulate God to reconsider his fate (Mk. 14:35-36//Mt. 26:39//Lk. 22:42). The prayer that is addressed to God in all three Synoptic accounts is a confused and conflictive combination of persuasive coercion and humble submission to God. First there is a request for compliance ('if it be possible' Mk. 14:35//Mt. 26:39, 'if thou art willing' Lk. 22:42), then the desired action is demanded ('take this cup away', Mk. 14:36//Mt. 26:39//Lk. 22:42) and finally there is a submission to the will of God ('not as I will, but as you will', Mk. 14:36//Mt. 26:39//Lk. 22:42). The insistent tone of the central request ('take this cup away') is immediately softened by the addition of the conjunction ἀλλὰ in all three Synoptics, which serves to refocus the prayer on God's own will and detracts from the potential interpretation that Jesus was attempting to influence the will of God. In addition, whereas the author of Mark has Jesus reiterate the same words in his second prayer attempt (Mk. 14:39), the author of Matthew uses Jesus' second prayer to correct a coercive reading by presenting a softer and more submissive version of the first prayer: 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done' (Mt. 26:42). This combination of aggressive coercion and submissive prayer is similar to the manipulative techniques employed by the magicians in the magical papyri who, in fear of the wrath of the gods or in order to appeal to their narcissistic side, abandon their demanding extortions and adopt complimentary prayer-like imprecations, nevertheless maintaining the intention to manipulate the gods to agree to their demands. We have previously encountered examples of this prayer-petition formula in Chapter II, but one text from the magical papyri is particularly relevant for comparative purposes in this instance. In PGM XII. 192-89a, entitled a 'favour charm', the magician compliments the god and asks that the god will grant him favour. Although the magician's overall

intention is to coerce the god into granting him immense power, the charm concludes with the statement: 'Give [me graciously] whatever you want' (XII. 189). In a brief footnote to this particular text, Sharyn Echols Dowd states that this approach is 'overtly manipulative flattery.'⁷²

Furthermore, as Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is attempted on multiple occasions (three times in Mt. 26:39-44 and twice in Mk. 14:35-39), this behaviour is very similar to the multiple repetitions and persistent demands that are characteristic of the magician engaging in spiritual magic in the ancient world. For example, Eli Edward Burriss comments in his study of the magical elements in Roman prayers that 'repetition characterises the magic incantation'⁷³ and it is most often the case that the magician in the magical papyri is required to repeat an incantation for a number of times before it will take effect.⁷⁴ An association between repetition and incantation is also made by the author of Matthew who has Jesus warn the disciples 'when you are praying, do not babble on like the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their many words' (Mt. 6:7-8).⁷⁵ It is perhaps with this repetitive magical behaviour in mind that Marcion attempts to protect Jesus against a charge of magic by asserting that he acted by 'his word alone,

⁷² Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering*, p. 145 n. 48.

⁷³ Eli Edward Burriss, 'The Magic Elements in Roman Prayers', *CPh* 25. 1 (1930) p. 51. For more on the magical connotations of repetition, see Burriss, *Taboo, Magic, Spirits: A Study of Primitive Elements in Roman Religion* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1931), particularly Chapter VI 'Incantation and Prayer.'

⁷⁴ For example, in PGM VII.505-28 the performer is required to 'speak the formula 7 times' and 'do this for 7 days'.

⁷⁵ Michael Joseph Brown suggests that in Matthew 6:7-8 'one finds the issue of petition to be in some tension with (a) the doctrine of divine omnibenevolence and (b) the doctrine of divine omniscience or providence.' (Michael Joseph Brown, "'Panem Nostrum': The Problem of Petition and the Lord's Prayer", *JR* 80. 4 (2000) p. 607).

without repeating it', thereby suggesting that to repeat a word would have dubious and possibly magical connotations.⁷⁶

If Jesus' words in Gethsemane are to be understood as an attempt to coerce God, then the absence of a positive response from God to his request, i.e. Jesus' salvation from the distressing situation at hand, could be blamed on either the petitioner (Jesus) or the petitioned (God). When magical operations fail to be effective, the blame often lies with the performer of the rite who has incorrectly applied his techniques or deviated from the precise instructions of his magical text. Can we likewise assume that Jesus did not address God in the correct manner and therefore his petition failed? Alternatively, the prayer itself may have been valid and the failure of a response was attributable to God. The failure of a god or spirit to respond to the magician's demands suggests that the spirit or god that has previously been accountable for empowering the magician to perform miracles is not present or that it has abandoned him. The ancients believed that a spirit, particularly a powerful spirit such as a god or a supreme demon, could withdraw its compliance or break the bonds by which the magician was able to manipulate him and consequently a Faustian withdrawal or nullification of power was a common occurrence in the ancient magical tradition. For example, Hutton Webster observes that the power given to a magical practitioner may be withdrawn under certain conditions:

'Occult power...can be lost if he proves to be unworthy of its retention or comes into contact with what is inimical to it. His power is likewise dissipated if he violates any restrictions laid upon him at the time of initiation or during the period of probation following his entrance upon his profession.'⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, IV. 9.

⁷⁷ Hutton Webster, *Magic: A Sociological Study* (New York: Octagon, 1973) p. 237.

If we consider Jesus' relationship with his spiritual power-source as a magician-familiar spirit relationship, then the failure of a response to the request made by Jesus in Gethsemane could suggest that there is no spiritual respondent to perform the required action. Indeed, Jesus' statement 'not what I will, but what you will' (οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σὺ, Mk. 14:36//Mt. 26:39// Lk. 22:42) implies that either he is reaffirming his position as a servant of God or that he is attempting to redress a potential reversal of power much like a magician discovers that he no longer has command over the gods and, fearing that the gods will punish him for their mistreatment, offers himself in fear and humble submission to them, stressing that his will is no longer binding but their own will can now be realised.

Regardless of the lack of a response from God in Gethsemane, the author of Matthew reveals that Jesus still considered himself capable of summoning spiritual aid as he boasts to one of his disciples 'do you think that I cannot appeal (παρακαλέσαι) to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels' (Mt. 26:53). By having Jesus demonstrate his expectation of an immediate response and using the Greek verb παρακαλέω, which carries a prayer-like tone but also has a strong sense of invocation⁷⁸, the author of Matthew suggests that Jesus faces his impending crucifixion as an arrogant magician who maintains a firm belief that his spiritual powers are at his immediate command. If Jesus was previously assured of immediate spiritual assistance and firmly believed that his will alone could produce miracles, then the lack of a positive response to his prayer in Gethsemane and on the cross may indicate that he is now incapable of

⁷⁸ W. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) p. 662.

manipulating his spiritual power-source to react to the summons of his will, or the spiritual power that has been under his command has now abandoned him. Certainly Jesus' outraged statement on the cross 'why have you forsaken me?' (Mk. 15:34//Mt. 27:46) suggests that he was anticipating that his demands would be met before he encountered the cross, i.e. he was expecting his request for salvation to be granted, his mountain to be moved.

The identity of the spirit to whom Jesus' cries out to on the cross is subject to a considerable degree of confusion amongst the Gospel authors themselves. While both the authors of Matthew and Mark identify God as the intended receptor of Jesus' words, they also unashamedly mention that those standing near to the cross believe that Jesus is calling upon Elijah (Mk. 15:35//Mt. 27:47). Since some of the prophets, such as Elijah, were believed not to have died but to have ascended to heaven, we could perhaps consider that Jesus was hoping to receive remote spiritual assistance from Elijah. However, Jesus' words are not a request for assistance but a cry of abandonment. In addition, confusion regarding the recipient of Jesus' plea is further exacerbated in the Gospel of Peter which states that the words spoken by Jesus on the cross were ἡ δύναμις μου, ἡ δύναμις μου ('my power, my power', 5:19).⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Zimmermann accounts for this unusual interpretation by explaining that Peter was a Galilean (as indicated in Mk. 14:70) and since Talmudic sources tell us that the Galilean dialect was not clearly articulate, Peter could have misheard or misunderstood the Hebrew 'my god' and reinterpreted the statement as the Hebrew 'my power' (Frank Zimmermann, 'The Last Words of Jesus', *JBL* 66. 4 (1947) p. 466).

If the Gospel writers intended to signify that a spiritual power had abandoned Jesus in Gethsemane and in his final moments on the cross, then perhaps the story of the crucifixion describes the abandonment of a magician by his attending spirit or a magician's failure to continue exploiting a spirit to obey his commands. If this absent power is to be identified as a spirit who was escaped from magical bondage, then those near to the cross may not have misheard when they thought that Jesus was crying out to Elijah (Mk. 15:35//Mt. 27:47) or his opponents may have been entirely justified when claiming that Jesus was empowered by the magical manipulation of a spirit such as John the Baptist, Beelzebul, Elijah, or an indiscriminate spiritual attending power. Alternatively, if the spiritual power that had been empowering Jesus in his ministry and had ultimately abandoned him on the cross is to be identified as God or the Holy Spirit (as implied in Jesus' response to the Beelzebul accusation in Mk. 3:28-29//Mt 12:31-32), then we must assume that either this withdrawal of power is to be understood as part of a larger salvific master-plan consciously willed by God or that it signifies the liberty of a divine spirit that has been freed from magical bondage. Either way, the vulnerable figure of Jesus who appears stripped of his magical powers and desperately petitioning his God in the final stages of the Gospels reveals what is perhaps the greatest fallacy of magic: although the magician believes he has dominion over the gods, they are simply humouring the magician, appearing to be compliant and yet capable of withdrawing their power at any moment.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS AND AFTERTHOUGHTS

‘I adjure you, father, by Orpha, that is your entire body,
and Orphamiel, that is the great finger of your right hand,
that you send me Jesus Christ...’

~ ‘Spell to cast out every unclean spirit’,
London Oriental Manuscript 6796, 41-44 ~

Throughout the course of this study we have been slicing into the Gospel materials to pinpoint magical techniques and magical attitudes that are present in Jesus’ behaviour. Now is the time to unfold the finished work and reveal the overall pattern to which each critical incision has contributed, although for some readers the results will not be particularly pretty. The portrait of Jesus that emerges from Mark’s Gospel in particular is in stark contrast to the familiar figure recognised by the mainstream Christian tradition and yet it is a faithful reflection of the evidence presented by the evangelist. That the author of Mark would consciously seek to portray Jesus as a magician is an astonishing thought. However the constant appearance of magical behaviours, techniques and attitudes throughout the Gospel ensures that Jesus does not merely satisfy one or two of the required credentials for an ancient magician, but he appears to fulfil them all.

To begin with, Jesus exhibits the typical *behaviours* of a magician. He appears in Mark’s Gospel as a shadowy figure who speaks in parables, withdraws from the crowds to give secret instruction to his close band of followers, engages in secretive prayers and

commands the public to keep his activities secret whenever they witness his miracle-working abilities. The magician practicing his art in the ancient world would behave in an identical manner; concealing his words in elaborate cryptography, engaging in magical instruction with his initiates, rejecting organised and communal worship and attempting to keep his activities away from public speculation.

Second, Jesus uses a variety of customary *methods of natural magic*. The Gospel writers reveal that Jesus incorporated various elements of natural magic into his healing ministry; the use of words of power, sighs or groans, spittle and the transference of energy through touch. The embarrassment felt by the Gospel writers regarding the implications of magic technique in their received texts is demonstrated by their attempts to edit out suspicious material and incorporate anti-magical apologetic whenever necessary. In addition, Jesus appears to possess a mana-like power that is effective without an appeal to God and produces immediate results (Mk. 5:25-34//Mt. 9:18-22//Lk. 8:43-48). Since both self-assurance and self-sufficiency in the application of a personal power were considered to be major indicators of magical practice in the ancient world, Jesus' autonomy in the application of this personal power-source is highly suspect.

Third, Jesus employs a *spiritual power-source* that works under his command. Possession theories are desperately inadequate when accounting for the relationship between Jesus and his spiritual power-source since there is a noticeable absence of possession traits in Jesus' behaviour throughout the Gospels. On the contrary, the degree of independence and autonomy that Jesus exerts in the application of his spiritual power is evident in the

recurrent themes of authority and control that permeate the Gospels. In addition, his ability to transmit this power to the disciples, who are subsequently able to heal and exorcise (Mk. 6:7-13//Mt. 10:1//Lk. 9:1), plainly contradicts the person-specific adoption model of spirit-possession. Although there are many parallels between the election rites typically endured by shamans in the ancient world and Jesus' baptism in the Jordan and his subsequent wilderness experience, comparing Jesus' behaviour to shamanistic activity is also ineffective as the seizures, trance states and aesthetic limitations that are commonly associated with shamanism are absent in the Gospel accounts.

In contrast to theories of spirit-possession, the Jesus-Spirit relationship that is portrayed throughout the Gospels fits comfortably into the magician-assisting spirit model that was commonplace in the ancient magical tradition. Both Jesus' followers and opponents claim that he is in possession of a spirit and that he is able to perform miracles as a direct result. For instance, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of the magical spirit-manipulation of a demonic being (Mk. 3:22//Mt. 12:24//Lk. 11:15) and although Jesus denies that his power-source is demonic and he immediately identifies it as the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 12:10), he is suspiciously knowledgeable of methods used by magicians to bind demons and employ them in magical operations. He reveals his knowledge of these binding techniques to the Pharisees (Mk. 3:27//Mt. 12:29) and demonstrates their application when binding the demon in the Capernaum synagogue using a silencing formula (Mk. 1:21-28) and requesting the name of the demon that possesses the Gerasene demoniac (Mk. 5:1-20).

In addition to this charge of demonic spirit manipulation, Herod states that Jesus has achieved the magical manipulation of the dead, more specifically, that he has raised John the Baptist from the dead and is subsequently performing miracles using John's spirit (Mk. 6:14-29//Mt. 14:2). When examining this allegation in the context of superstitions surrounding the magical employment of the dead in the ancient world, we immediately uncover other aspects of Jesus' behaviour in the Gospels which suggest that he was involved in necromantic activity. As the Gospel writers inform us that Jesus was able to resurrect the dead, it is entirely logical to assume that he would be perfectly capable of the physical resurrection of John the Baptist, particularly since the many depictions of Jesus raising Lazarus with a wand in early Christian art suggest that certain individuals believed that Jesus was using a magical, necromantic tool to raise the dead. Alternatively, it is equally credible that Herod's correlation between Jesus and John constitutes an allegation that he was engaging in divinatory practices. The possibility that Jesus was consulting the dead is supported by his consultation of the spirits of Moses and Elijah in all three Synoptic Gospels (Mk. 9:4// Mt. 17:3// Lk. 9:30) and the appearance on two separate occasions of a young man who is similar in appearance to the boy mediums commonly used by necromancers to consult the spirit world. A third interpretation of Herod's statement emerges when investigating the magical manipulation of the souls of the dead in antiquity and the superstitions surrounding those who had died a violent or untimely death. Due to the violent nature of his death, John the Baptist would have been considered by many to be a particularly powerful βίαιοθάνων and a prime example of a spirit that would be used by magicians to perform miracles. Therefore it is highly likely that Herod's accusation in Mk. 6:14-29//Mt. 14:2 is that Jesus has possession of the spirit

of John the Baptist. In light of Jesus' ability to command the dead (Mk. 5:1-20) and his awareness of magical methods used to bind spirits in order to gain their assistance, the suggestion that he had bound the spirit of John and was using him as a powerful assisting-spirit is an entirely rational proposal.

Allegations of magical spirit-manipulation are not only made by Jesus' opponents, but also by his followers and the general public. The response to Jesus' question 'who do men say I am?' in Mk. 8:27-28//Mt. 16:13-14//Lk. 9:18-19 and the alternative identities proposed to Herod in Mk. 6:15//Lk. 9:7-8 indicate that rumours were circulating amongst the general populace of Jesus' time that he derived his miracle-working abilities from a spirit of the dead; either John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets. In addition, the centurion in Mt. 8:5-11//Lk. 7:1-10 implies that Jesus presides over spirits that are subject to him and who will respond immediately to his summons to produce miracles. Jesus' positive response in this instance confirms that the centurion has made a valid observation regarding his power-source. Furthermore, in his response to his opponents' charge of spirit-manipulation, Jesus openly reveals that the spirit that he is using to perform his miracles is the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:31//Lk. 12:10). The Gospel authors are clearly uncomfortable with the implied 'use of' the Holy Spirit in this passage and this is demonstrated by the tension between the Lukan δακτύλῳ θεοῦ ('finger of God', Lk. 11:20) and the Matthean πνεῦμα ('spirit', 12:28, 31-32). Since the assisting spirits in the magical papyri were often of divine origin, the identification of Jesus' spirit as a πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (Mk. 3:29//Mt. 12:32//Lk. 12:10) should not discount the possibility that an anonymous divine spirit was being manipulated by Jesus in order to perform his

miracles, especially since the accounts of a divine assisting-spirit appearing to a magician in the magical papyri are suspiciously similar to the account of the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism.

Finally, Jesus displays the quintessential *attitude* of a magician: a coercive approach to the gods. Although the absence of an appeal to God before a healing or exorcism may indicate that Jesus has achieved a relationship with God that was typical of a charismatic healer, it is also reminiscent of the magician's arrogant attitude towards his god and the self-assured guarantee that his god will respond to his immediate demands. This arrogant conviction is evident in Jesus' reckless cursing of the fig tree in Mk. 11:12-24//Mt. 21:18-22. Jesus not only uses a magical cursing technique in this passage, but he also demonstrates that his power can be used for destructive purposes and teaches that the strength of an individual's own will can produce miracles. By teaching that others can recreate the same miracles if they have sufficient faith in their own actions, Jesus thereby implies that his abilities are not God-given, but that they are acquired techniques that can be taught to others.

Although this theory is applied successfully in Jesus' healing and exorcistic ministry, it fails dramatically with severe consequences when attempted in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32-42//Mt. 26:36-46//Lk. 22:39-46). Although Jesus appears throughout the Gospels as an individual who possesses great power and authority, commanding demons and healing the sick often on the strength of his words alone, this is strongly contrasted with the tragic figure who appears in Gethsemane in a state of distress, praying desperately to his

spiritual powers to deliver him and ultimately crying out in abandonment on the cross. Whatever the true identity of the spiritual source that had been empowering Jesus up to this point (Beelzebul, John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets, the Spirit of God, or an anonymous assisting spirit), it has clearly abandoned Jesus on the cross, thereby nullifying his magical abilities and leaving him powerless to prevent his own death.



There are many additional areas of research that could be explored at this juncture but time and space restrictions simply do not allow their investigation. For example, I have been approached by many individuals engaged in Pentecostal studies who are interested to discover whether magical connotations of spirit-manipulation can be applied to the spiritual experiences of contemporary Pentecostal groups. Additionally, since the figure of Jesus the magician impacts widely upon the Gospel tradition, new material which emerges of interest to New Testament studies will most probably inform, and be informed by, the figure of Jesus the magician and/or the theories of ancient magic in general.¹ However, I would like to conclude by taking a brief excursion into an area that is immediately relevant to our study but may take us beyond the boundaries of the Gospels. It is a subject that is occasionally addressed in studies of ancient magic but it is not generally discussed in New Testament academia. This is the use of Jesus' name and his spirit in magical rituals and procedures, both during his lifetime and after his death.

¹ This has recently occurred with the publication of the 'Gospel of Judas', in which angelic 'attendants' (ΠΑΡΑΧΤΑΙΣ) are mentioned on three occasions.

Christian symbolism in ancient magic

The high degree of syncretism that is present in the magical papyri is due in part to the magician's tendency to modify his techniques and swap his allegiance to spiritual agents in a bid to discover the most effective method for his incantations. It is no surprise, then, that Christian symbolism was quickly embraced by magicians keen to adopt new methodologies and a considerable amount of Christian names, prayers and even Gospel passages were promptly absorbed into the magical tradition. Later magical texts often employed Christian symbolism in incantations for healing, exorcism and protection against evil and the popular usage of Christian material in charms and amulets appears to have survived right up to the modern-day.² The incorporation of Christian symbolism into the ancient magical tradition also included the person of Jesus, who came to be represented on amulets, gems and in magical drawings. Morton Smith, for example, says:

‘of the three oldest representations of the crucifixion, two are on magical gems and the third probably refers to Christian magical belief.’³

Images of the two magical gems mentioned by Smith have been reproduced in Appendix B (figs. 2 and 3), however it was not only the *depiction* of Jesus that was integrated into the magical tradition, but also the *name* of Jesus came to be used as a valuable incantational device.

² For example, John Hull comments: ‘the Christians the third and fourth centuries were already using texts from the gospels in amulets and spells’ (John Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, (Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd Series 28; London: SCM, 1974) p. 20.

³ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Gollancz, 1978) p. 61.

Hallowed be thy name: the magical use of the name 'Jesus'

The Gospel writers do not hesitate to mention that Jesus' name was being used in healing and exorcistic incantations during his lifetime. For example, the author of Luke has the seventy (two) disciples return to Jesus and say 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' (Lk. 10:17). The report of the strange exorcist, who also uses Jesus name to cast out demons, demonstrates that it was not only Jesus' followers that were able to use his name to great effect (Mk. 9:38-9//Lk. 9:49-50). The author of Luke also reveals that this practice continued after Jesus' death; in Acts 16:18 we read that Paul was able to exorcise demons 'in the name of Jesus Christ', the apostle Peter is able to heal 'in the name of Jesus Christ' in Acts. 3:6 (cf. Acts. 9:32-35) and even the Jewish exorcists attempt to use this technique in Acts 19:11-20.⁴ Since unidentified exorcists, such as the strange exorcist, were able to use this method successfully, then we must assume that the relationship between the practitioner and the person of Jesus was largely irrelevant and that the name itself possessed magical properties. Furthermore, as some exorcists failed to employ this method effectively (Acts 19:11-20) this suggests that the use of Jesus' name was a technique that must learnt to be applied correctly.

The magical properties of the name 'Jesus' seems to account for the popularity of its usage by magicians during and after the period of the crucifixion. Morton Smith observes that 'in Jesus' lifetime magicians began to use his name in spells'⁵ and 'there is no

⁴ Origen also observes that the name of Jesus was being used to cast out demons (Origen, *Con. Cels.* 1.25).

⁵ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 61.

question that Jesus' name continued to be used in magic as that of a supernatural power by whose authority demons might be conjured.'⁶ The name 'Jesus' is employed in the magical papyri for a variety of purposes. Most often, Jesus is invoked by name to assist in exorcisms; for example in an 'excellent rite for driving out demons' (PGM IV. 1227-64) the magician invokes 'Jesus Chrestos' (IV. 1233). Similarly, in 'a tested charm of Pibechis for those possessed by daimons' (PGM IV. 3007-86) the magician declares 'I conjure you by the god of the Hebrews, Jesus' (IV. 3019). The name of Jesus also features in various other types of spells. For example, in a request 'for release from bondage', the magician asks 'Hear me, O Christ' (PGM XIII. 289) and in the fragmentary text PGM XII. 190-192 (a 'request for a dream oracle') the invocation begins 'IESOUS ANOUI...' (XII.192). The name EIESOUS also appears in PGM XII. 376-96 (a 'charm to induce insomnia', XII. 391). There is, however, a major difficulty when proposing that the name 'Jesus' had magical properties and Stevan Davies addresses this problem head-on when he makes the following objection:

'at that point in history the name *Jesus* (as common then as Bob is now) would not have had 'magical' efficacy'⁷

If the name 'Jesus' was commonplace in a first-century environment, then how is it that Jesus' followers and the magicians who subsequently employed this name claimed that it had a powerfully magical effect on others?

⁶ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 62-63.

⁷ S. L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance and the Origins of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1995) p. 111.

The ancients believed that the transformation of a common name into a magical word could be achieved through a process of glorifying, or hallowing, the name until it achieved a magical status. By promoting the name of a god amongst outsiders and closely associating it with the performance of miracles and wonders, the name was thought to gradually assume a mystical quality that would eventually transform it over time into a magical word of power. The widespread nature of this practice in both the Gospels and the magical tradition is demonstrated by Morton Smith who compares Jesus' glorification of the name of God in Jn. 17 to parallel passages in the Greek magical papyri. Smith compares Jesus' statement 'glorify your son that your son may glorify you' (δόξασόν σου τὸν υἱόν, ἵνα ὁ υἱὸς δοξάσῃ σέ, Jn. 17:1) with an almost identical phrase in PGM VII. 490-504: 'glorify me as I have glorified the Name of your son Horus!' (δόξασόν με ὡς ἐδόξασα τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ σου Ὡρος, VII. 504).⁸ Although Smith does not elaborate on the similarities between these two statements, Betz comments in his footnote to PGM VII. 504: 'although this sentence seems parallel to Jn. 17:4-5, there is no Christian influence here.'⁹

The glorification of names in order to make them widely known and subsequently accord them a powerful status was not restricted to the names of gods in the ancient world. Names of individuals who were considered to be successful exorcists were also used by magicians and miracle-workers in their exorcism rituals. For example, Graham Twelftree

⁸ Smith, *Jesus the Magician* p. 132. A similar declaration is made by the magician in PGM XXXVI. 165: 'I glorify your sacred and honoured names which are in heaven'.

⁹ H. D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) p. 131.

comments that the name of Solomon was widely used by exorcists in the New Testament era and that Josephus recommended the use of the name of another exorcist when exorcising demons.¹⁰ Both the disciples of Jesus and the anonymous magicians of antiquity may have been using Jesus' name in order to associate their operations with the powerful reputation and the divine sanction of another powerful miracle-worker/magician. However, although this may satisfactorily account for the use of Jesus' name by his followers in the Gospels, the common usage of names in ancient magic reveals some alternative explanations for the use of Jesus' name in magical ritual.

Since a magician would frequently attempt to gain control over a spirit or individual by appealing to the name of a higher power (as attempted by the demoniac in Mk. 5:7), the name of Jesus appears to have been used in a similar way to add authority and power to the magician's spell. However, in addition to a simple request for Jesus' assistance, some appeals to Jesus' name in later magical texts are outright attempts to acquire the spirit of Jesus and subsequently employ it to perform magic.

The use of the spirit of Jesus in the magical tradition

Douglas Geyer suggests that the crucifixion of Jesus, much like the decapitation of John the Baptist, constituted 'a type of *σπαργμός*, or a desecrative rending of the flesh.'¹¹ The

¹⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* 8. 46-9 (G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) p. 139).

¹¹ Douglas W. Geyer, *Fear, Anomaly, and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark*, ATLA Monograph Series, 47 (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002) p. 215.

violent nature of the crucifixion is described by Joel B. Green as follows:

‘Rome did not embrace crucifixion as its method of choice for execution on account of the excruciating pain it caused. The act of crucifixion resulted in little blood loss and death came slowly, as the body succumbed to shock.’¹²

If John the Baptist would have been accorded all the superstitions regarding a violent death and subsequently viewed as a βαιοθάνατος, then Jesus’ violent manner of execution would surely have attracted the same suspicious attention. Unsurprisingly, there are reports of magicians scrabbling around for control of the spirit of Jesus following his crucifixion on the premise that he was now a powerful βαιοθάνατος and readily accessible through magical means. The necromantic manipulation of Jesus’ spirit is addressed in the *Martyrdom of Pionius*, in which Pionius reports that the Jews at Smyrna in 250AD considered Jesus to be a βιοθανής due to his violent death and they accused the Christians of practicing necromancy using his spirit.¹³ The allegation is as follows: λέγουσι δὲ καὶ νεκουμαντεῖαν πεποιηκέναι καὶ ἀνηγειροῦναι τὸν Χριστὸν μετὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ.¹⁴ There is some disagreement whether this passage is an account of the necromantic manipulation of Jesus’ spirit or an accusation that Jesus himself performed necromancy on the cross. For example, H. Musurillo translates this sentence as ‘they assert that Christ performed necromancy or spirit-divination with the cross’¹⁵, however J.

¹² Joel B. Green, ‘Crucifixion’ in Markus Bockmuehl (ed.) *Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 91.

¹³ For a discussion of this text, see Jan Den Boeft and Jan Bremmer, ‘Notiunculae Martyrologicae III. Some Observations on the Martyria of Polycarp and Pionius’, *VC* 39. 2 (1985) pp. 110 -130.

¹⁴ *The Martyrdom of Pionius*, 13:3.

¹⁵ H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972), 137-167.

L. Roberts proposes the more accurate translation: 'that they performed necromancy and that they brought up Christ with the cross.'¹⁶

Evidence of the necromantic manipulation of the spirit of Jesus is found in many later Christian magical texts. One prime example appears in a fourth or fifth century text entitled 'spell invoking Christ for protection against illness and ill treatment' (Egyptian Museum 10263).¹⁷ The spell begins by invoking Jesus using the typical method of recounting details about his life (i.e. 'in the womb of the virgin Mary, who was born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, who was crucified...') and the overall purpose of the spell is to protect the bearer from illness and evil influences. Since Meyer comments that this papyrus 'seems to have been buried with a mummy', we may assume that the performer of this rite has utilised a familiar technique used to manipulate the untimely dead by placing the spell in a tomb alongside a corpse, thereby assuming that Jesus can be used and summoned as easily as the rest of the dead in the Underworld.¹⁸ The name 'Jesus' also appears as a means of magical self-identification, a method previously discussed in Chapter VIII. For example, in a sixth-century exorcistic incantation entitled 'spell to cast out every unclean spirit' (Oriental Manuscript 6796), the magician uses the familiar 'I am' formula to identify himself with Jesus ('I am Jesus Christ'). A crucifixion scene also accompanies the main text (see Appendix B, fig. 4) and the spirit of Jesus is invoked through an elaborate ritual of adjurations and offerings during which the

¹⁶ J. and L. Roberts, *Fouilles d'Amyzon en Carie I* (Paris, 1983), p. 262.

¹⁷ For full text, see M. W. Meyer and R. Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999) pp. 35-36.

¹⁸ Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, p. 35.

magician states:

'I adjure you, father, by Orpha, that is your entire body, and Orphamiel, that is the great finger of your right hand, that you send me Jesus Christ...'¹⁹

The incorporation of Jesus' name into magical procedures indicates that Jesus was considered by many magicians in the first centuries, particularly those responsible for constructing these texts, to be a powerful magician and consequently a potent source of authority for their spells. In addition, the attempts to control Jesus' spirit that appear in many of the later Christian magical texts suggest that he had fallen victim to the procedures with which he was charged during his lifetime; the manipulator had become the manipulated. Ultimately, if the accusations of magic made by the opponents of Jesus were proven to be unfounded and malicious lies and the techniques of magical practice in the Gospels were entirely fabricated by the Gospel authors or completely innocent methods of healing, then the indisputable fact remains that, like many other miracle-workers who flirted on the boundaries of magic, Jesus was considered by some during his lifetime to be a capable magician and he remained closely associated with magic following his death.

¹⁹ For full text, see Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, pp. 290 – 291.



A final thought

At St. Bartholomew's Church on Good Friday 2006, Jolbad held a serious conversation with Caiaphas. This was partly as an apology for mocking him on previous occasions, but primarily because I realised that I had a lot more in common with him than I thought. With this came the terrible realisation that I could possibly endure the same ridicule that I had previously heaped upon poor Jolbad eight years ago. However, as I have the opportunity to defend my argument in a doctoral thesis and the important advantage of not being a literary character (!), I hope that any doubtful derision has been quashed under the sheer weight of the evidence that has been presented. Furthermore, a comforting thought has sustained me throughout this thesis and has anchored my mind into academic study when the theories of ancient magic and divine men have become a little too fanciful or far-fetched. It is as follows.

There have been thousands upon thousands of self-proclaimed magicians throughout history and many individuals still claim to practice magic to this current day. Accounts of magicians appear in all forms of literature, from the sinister figures of serious religious discourse to the comedic characters of children's stories, and they are represented on both ancient gemstones and on the modern cinema screen. And yet many of us would reject the possibility that the Historical Jesus was one of the many magicians in the ancient world, or even ignore the overwhelming evidence that these individuals existed

altogether, on the basis that these characters are objects of fantasy and whimsy in the modern age. We would prefer instead to propose, with a serious amount of sobriety and solemnity, that Jesus was the Son of God who had come down to earth. Although this alternative viewpoint is equally fantastical to the modern mind, it is widely considered to be an entirely sensible and realistic possibility. When weighing the sheer scale of magical activity in the ancient world and the considerable evidence of magical technique in Jesus' behaviour in the Gospels against the biased propaganda circulated by the followers of Jesus who sought to promote their hero above his contemporary wonder-workers, the suggestion that the Historical Jesus was a mere magician who was dragging down heaven to serve his own requirements is clearly the more rational explanation.

APPENDIX A

THE WAND IN EARLY CHRISTIAN ART



Figure 1.
Jesus Raising Lazarus from the dead, Fresco,
Catacomb of Callixtus, Rome, mid 3rd century



Figure 2.
The Raising of Lazarus, Fresco, Roman catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus,
end of 3rd century to early 4th century



Figure 3.
Raising of Lazarus, Fresco, Catacomb cubiculum
O, Rome, 4th century



Figure 4.
A Feeding Miracle, Catacomb fresco, Rome, mid 3rd century



Figure 5.
The Raising of Lazarus, Fresco, Catacomb of St. Priscilla;
Rome, 3rd century



Figure 6.
The Raising of Lazarus, Detail of sarcophagus, 3rd century

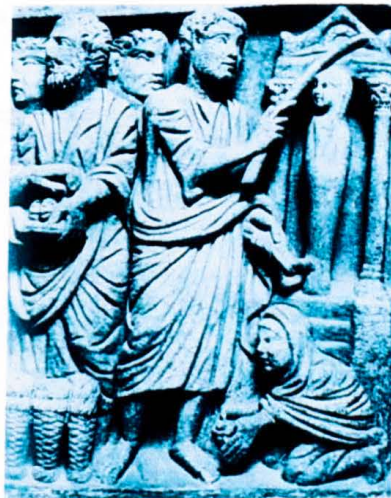


Figure 7.
The Raising of Lazarus, Sarcophagus in Lateran, 4th century



Figure 8.
Jesus healing the man born blind and raising Lazarus, sarcophagus,
Vatican Museum, Rome, 4th century



Figure 9.
Sarcophagus with Scenes from the Life of Peter
4th century, Arles, Musée Réattu

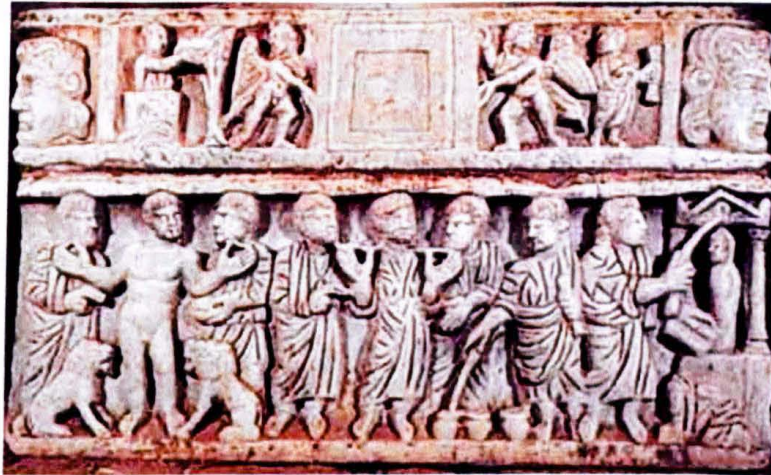


Figure 10.
The Sarcophagus of the Child,
Catacombs of Saint Callixtus, Mid-4th century



Figure 11.
Jesus raising the dead and the adoration of the magi, sarcophagus,
Vatican Museo Pio Cristiano, 4th century

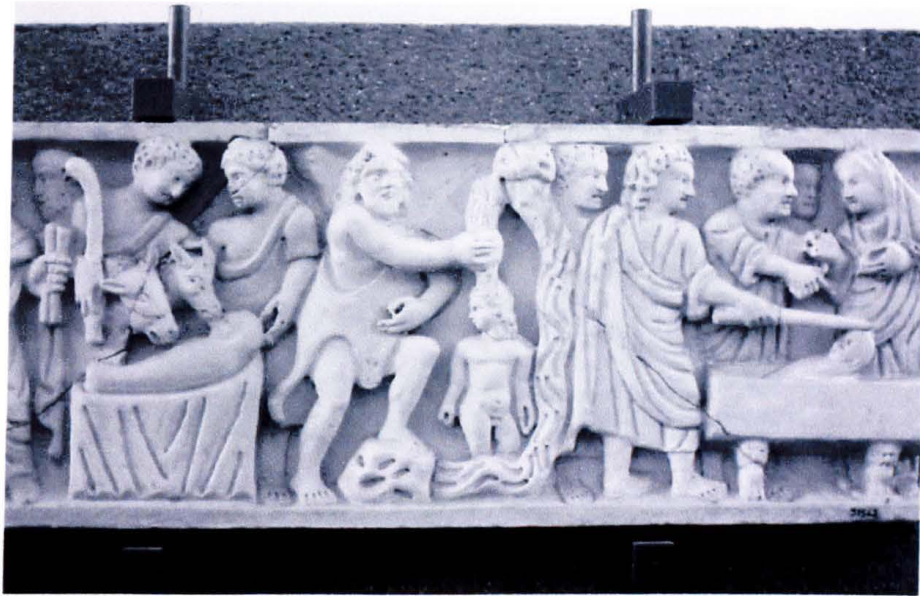


Figure 12.
Nativity, baptism of Jesus, and Jesus raising Jairus' daughter, sarcophagus, Vatican Museum, Rome, 4th century



Figure 13.
Abraham offering Isaac, Jesus healing the man born blind and the paralytic, Sarcophagus, Vatican Museum, Rome, 4th century



Figure 14.
Jesus with Peter and Paul, sarcophagus, Vatican Museum, Rome, 4th century

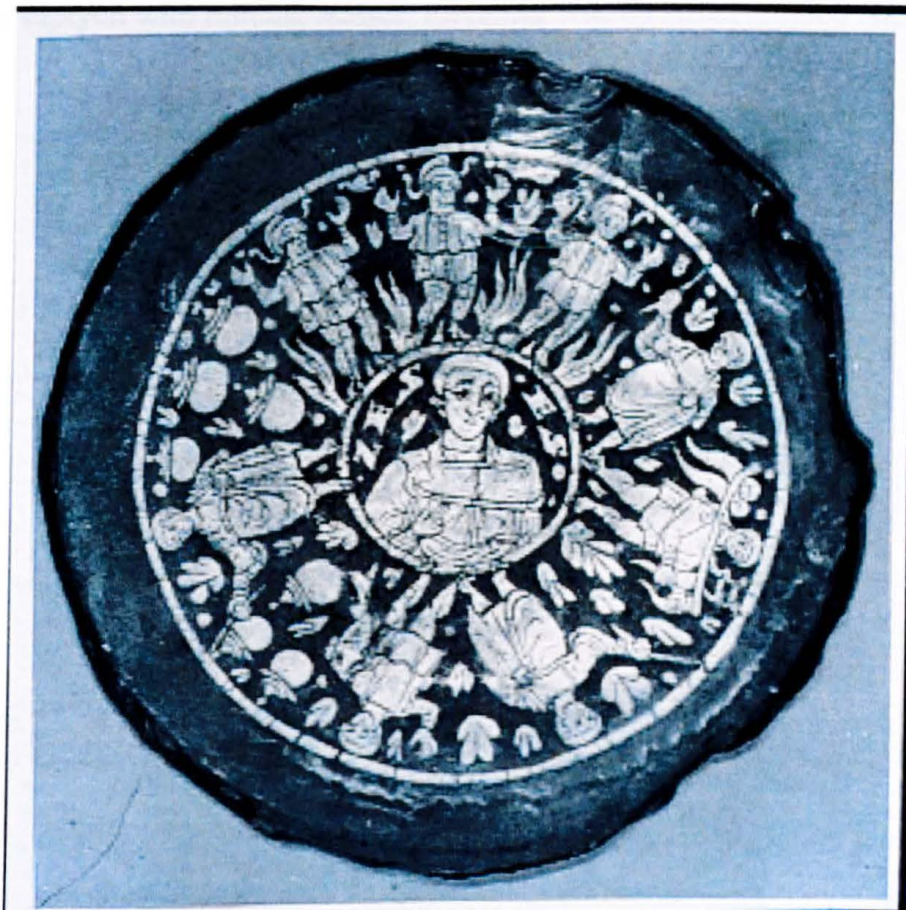


Figure 15.
Gilt Glass Bowl, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 4th century



Figure 16.
Ivory diptych with miracle scenes, Ravenna, Museo Archeologico Nazionale
6th century



Figure 17.
The Andrews diptych, ivory, north Italian, mid 5th century



Figure 18.
Peter's Water Miracle, sarcophagus, Museo Nazionale delle Terme,
Rome, 4th century



Figure 19.
Moses striking a rock to get water. Catacombs wall painting,
Rome, 4th century.



Figure 20.
Moses striking the rock, Catacombs of St. Peter and Marcellinus,
Rome, 3rd century



Figure 21.
Moses crossing the Red Sea, Catacomb fresco, Rome, 4th century

Figs. 8, 9, 11-14 from Robin M. Jensen 'The Economy of the Trinity at the Creation of Adam and Eve' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.4 (1999) 527-546.

APPENDIX B

CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM IN EARLY CHRISTIAN MAGIC



Figure 1.

Two-sided magic amulet with image of the raising of Lazarus, stone, Jerusalem, Bible Lands Museum.

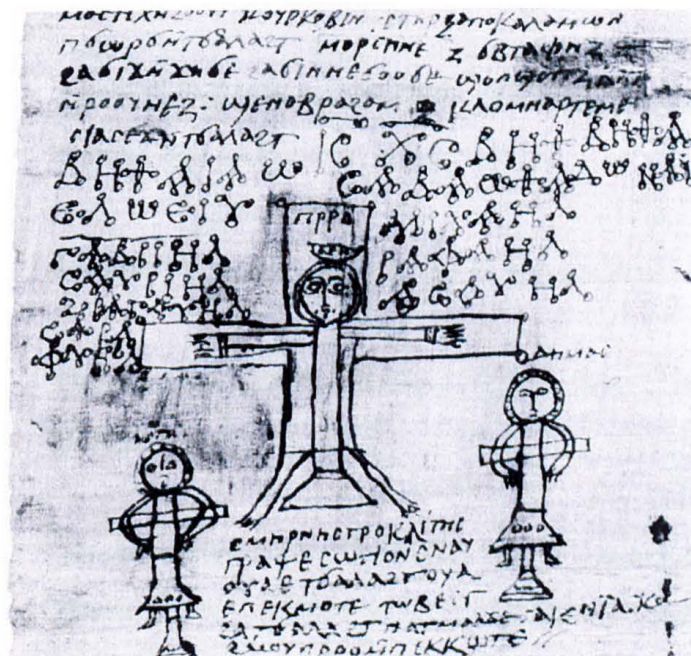


Figure 2.

Magical Gem, The Pereire collection, Smith dates 'about A.D. 200' (Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p. 81).



Fig. 3.
Magical gem, no. G231, British Museum.
Photo: Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989).



LONDON ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPT 6796
(lower part)

Figure 4.
Spell to cast out every unclean spirit (London Oriental Manuscript 6796 [4], 6796).
Photo: Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith.

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